

# AWAKE

A Vampire Tale

AmArA

**Awake**  
**a vampire tale**

**NOVEL by**  
**AmarA**

*COVER & ILLUSTRATIONS by*  
*jk*

1<sup>st</sup> Edition



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This book contains excerpts from:

*The Prophet* written by Kahlil Gibran

originally published in 1923 by Alfred A. Knopf

Honoring the wishes of the author, send gifts to his home town:

Bsharri, Lebanon

C/O the Gibran National Committee

Beaulieu bldg. 2nd fl. (facing Banque Audi), Badaro main St.,

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*The Tao te Ching* by Lao Tzu

Translated by Derek Yin

[www.Taoism.net](http://www.Taoism.net)

*Tao Te Ching: Annotated & Explained*

published by SkyLight Paths in 2006



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**For my Father,**

who bought me every illustrated classic he could find:  
This was to be a father's day gift when I thought it was a short  
story, but it became what it is with a years to grow. I hope it  
is interest enough to pay for the time.



**And for jk,**

my belovedest muse, who is so many people in my mind:  
Kae'a teisha, si'amato.





# Day 1



"Your living is determined not so much by what life brings to you as by the attitude you bring to life; not so much by what happens to you as by the way your mind looks at what happens."

-- *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran

## Chapter 1



### The First Awakening

Awake.

I could feel the dreams fading and dissipating as the synapses of consciousness started firing. The world of the mind being replaced by the world of the senses. Even as my body was totally relaxed, still sleeping, the dialogue of the brain began identifying the input, like a fog dispelling to reveal the landscape:

*Bang! Crackle.* Fireworks being set off right outside the window.

*High pitched screams and screeches.* Children laughing and playing with the fireworks.

*Rumbling and whizzing.* Cars. A busy road a block or two down.

*Thirsty.*

As my senses continued to report back to my awake mind, I realized that I was sleeping not on a bed as I might have expected or even on a couch, which is not an unheard of state, but on a carpeted floor. Rolling onto my back, I inhaled deeply:

*Sulfur smell of fireworks, cut grass trimmed a few hours ago, pine, something unidentifiable and delicious.*

*Thirsty.*

*What happened last night?* I asked myself. I mentally checked myself over. Not bruised or battered, other than what one might expect sleeping on a thinly carpeted floor. I was not nauseous, no headache, no hangover. Just thirsty.

I delved into my mind for what happened last night: Nothing. A total blank. I knew who I am, I knew my name and social security and first pet. I just didn't remember last night.

*What is the last thing I remember?* I asked myself, remaining calm. *Yesterday afternoon?*

Yes, home. I remembered being at home in my apartment in SoDo, Seattle. I remembered the phone ringing and the memories spilled through me a gushing torrent, rolling unstoppable through my mind:

*RING ring, RING ring. At home, getting ready to go out. On the street then with my friend, walking. A bar. A shadowy man, a shadowy smile. Street after unknown street. Darkness.*

I tried to rewind, to recall and hold an image so I could study it, looking at a puzzle piece, but I couldn't. It just rolled through my head as a single thing, ungraspable.

*Thirsty.*

The sensation broke me out of my focus to remember and a shock of fear ran through me. I had never blacked out before. Never lost time drinking, never even passed out. It was terrifying. I realized with a jolt that wherever I was, I was not at home. I did not have carpets like this and there were no children playing on the street where I lived. I kept my eyes

closed, as though if I did not open them I would be transported home. As though if my vision did not report, this might all be a dream. But the other senses can not be denied and curiosity is a force as inescapable as gravity; my eyes popped open and swerved around.

It was an empty room. Completely empty: No people, no furniture. Four walls with one open door leading to a hallway, an open glass door to a small balcony, and another open door to an empty closet, with nary even a wire hanger. I sat up, hugging my knees to me. Listening past the ambient noise for sounds of life in the building.

*Nothing.*

I couldn't hear anyone in the apartment I was in, nor above, nor below. I crept silently to my feet and explored hesitantly, quietly.

*Thirsty.*

The bedroom and the bathroom off the hall were just as the one I had woken up in, completely empty and clean. In the kitchen, I turned on the tap and drank, holding my head under the spout and my long copper hair away from the spray. My mouth had that alien feeling of first waking. After spitting out the ugly morning taste with the first wetness, I drank like a desert creature, in long mouth-filling swallows until I was full. I was still Thirsty.

I had no idea where I was or how I had gotten here. It was time to leave.

The sun was behind the hills, throwing brilliant reds and oranges onto the blanket of clouds as I stole quietly out the front door, down the stairs and down the driveway and onto the street.

## Chapter 2



### The Shadow

He might well be a monument: The man in the shadows stands so still. He watches the children setting up fireworks in the middle of the dead end road dispassionately. With no supervision, the kids conspire to cut fuses, merge different fireworks, and make dares that should lead to some tragedy, but never does. It is as if their very innocence shields them.

The shadow man's attention is diverted as the ginger girl walks quickly and quietly down the driveway onto the street. Her sweatshirt hood is pulled up and her hair is a spill of red in front of her face obscuring her features, like looking at someone through a fire. She is hugging her arms around her lithe frame. She is a self-contained unit, shielded.

She walks down the sidewalk, deftly giving a few feet berth to the parents coming out of apartments and houses to call in their children for the evening. Denying the Thirst that such proximity exacerbates through sheer will. His mind races behind an unmoving visage.

“Strong.” He says to the shadows, as he recalls his own first waking and the beast within that demanded blood, any blood, all blood. If he hadn’t had someone there, someone to guide him...He shudders at the thought as she glides past where he hides in plain sight. He wishes he could help her and shifts slightly, almost deciding to come out into the glow of twilight and street light, but he stills and stays within the shadow until she turns the corner out of sight.

“It must be done this way. It must.” His voice is quiet, deep, and intense. Nodding to his own assessment, he disappears into the darkness.

## Chapter 3



### The Thirst

In the suburban areas of Washington State, it is the habit to build a big commercial road with main residential streets shooting off of it. From that main street, short dead end or looping roads spike off in either direction. The convention gives that cozy neighborhood feel, with a mega grocery department store and full plaza of boutiques just a few blocks away. The sum result of this habit of building is to make it completely impossible to find any suburban house without a GPS, while making it child's play to find the stores from any neighborhood.

That was good, because the tasty undercurrent of smell was completely overwhelming from the second I stepped out onto the street. All around me copper, sweet, salty tang on the back of my tongue.

It drove the thirst. The thirst filled me, enveloped my mind. It made it hard to reason, to plan, to think. It was like nothing I had ever felt before and I did not know what it was or why it was. I just knew I had to keep moving. I followed the sound of traffic until I could see the Fred Meyer sign ahead, kitty corner from where the street dumped out on the commercial strip. Perfect.

The fluorescent lights high up in the near empty parking lot were too bright to me, so inside the store was like staring into a spot light. I stayed behind my hair, my refuge, my secret clubhouse for one. The smells were intoxicating. The tasty, coppery smell was here too jumbled up with breads and fruits and pastries and meats. I walked around the fruit and veggie stands, hoping one would jump out, unveil itself as the object of my craving, the fulfillment of this thirst. The

bakery didn't catch my attention, nor the surf section. The meats drew me. I could smell the taste of chicken, of pork, of beef. They weren't exactly what I wanted, but close, so close. Like Sprite when you are jonesing for Mountain Dew.

"Know what you need?" Asked the nondescript guy behind the counter.

"Can you get...um...pig's blood by the quart?" I asked, trying to make it sound like a reasonable request when it sounded like a bizarre question in my mind.

"Not pig's, no." Replied the guy, as though it were ordinary, "but beef, yeah. If that'll work."

"Sure." My mouth bypassed my brain.

I wondered vaguely how they get the blood here at the store. It is not as though they are butchering the animal in the back, after all. An image of the guy wringing out a raw cut steak, as one rings out a dish towel, came to me. The blood thick rubies fell in slow motion in my mind-eye.

"That it for ya?" Nondescript guy pulled me back from my strange fantasy.

"Thanks." I replied, taking the styrofoam container from him quickly and heading for the front of the store. I slapped my right butt pocket out of habit, feeling the wallet, suddenly relieved that it was, in fact, there. In the strangeness of waking and the thirst, the thought that I might have been robbed and dumped in that empty apartment hadn't even occurred.

At the register, I found that my money and debit card were present and accounted for, but my student ID for Washington University and my drivers license were both MIA.

*Who takes ID's but leaves the cash?* I wondered. Another strangeness to add to the list.

I could smell the woman on the other side of the scanning machine. *Copper, salt, stale, tired, mellow, a*

*bit sour.* Words rolled through my mind that I have never associated with scent before.

I forced my attention to my hair, my barrier between me and her. *Shampoo, crisp, sun.* The thirst showed me the red and blue pulses in her wrist as she waited by habit, hand ready for receipt to print. I closed my eyes. Focused on my hair. I heard her rip the little slip of paper and snatched the receipt she held out, grabbed my prize and headed for the bathroom, silent to her rote politenesses.

The Ladies was, blessedly, empty. The sanitizing, disinfecting, deodorizing smells were overpowering and normal and wonderful. I locked myself in the handicapped stall and sat on the floor. back to the wall releasing the iron grip I had held myself and the thirst in. It raced through me, the thirst, as I tore off the bag and the lid. It washing away disgust and fear and normal. It demanded and it transformed to sweet exhilaration as the the blood hit my mouth. Like wine, like fruit juice, like real maple syrup thick and flowing, but with just the slightest jar to it. Milk that has gone a bit sour, grape juice when you expected apple. It is not what the Thirst exactly wanted, but it accepted it. It basked in it.

The banging of the Ladies Room door brought me back to myself, licking the bottom of the container, the sides torn off, scattered and clean of blood.

*I don't remember destroying the styrofoam.*

The Thirst was not gone, not satisfied or sated, but it was abated. It wasn't the demanding focal point of my existence anymore, but an internal nudge, a craving.

I sat still in the relief and peace, panic and confusion as heels clicked static on the tiles, door shut, lock turned in that echoing way of public bathrooms. Quietly I stood and stepped out to face the mirror, brushing the hair and the hood back.

I was pale. I had always had the fair skin that goes with my hair, and sunless Seattle always kept me that way. But now I was beyond pale: I was ghostly, chalky, porcelain.

To this point, I had been subtly repressing the sum conclusion of all the evidence that had been mounting since I woke. Repressing my mouth reporting that my canine teeth felt longer, repressing the keenness of the smells, the intensity of the sensory input, the Thirst. Seeing myself in the mirror after gratefully downing a quart of beef blood forced an acknowledgment. My teeth looked even longer and sharper than my tongue had told me, my eyes shone out at me like faceted emeralds. This was not the girl I remembered from any mirror I had ever seen.

I did not know any vampires. I had never even met one, that I knew of.

*Until last night, evidently.* I thought, wryly.

They are the proven urban legend, vampires. That they exist is known and accepted and always has been, but that is about all science has managed to prove, because vampires have almost completely avoided scientific study. I learned in school that we know so little about them because their bodies turn to ash when they die. It isn't even known concretely if they are a subspecies or their own unique beings. The locker-side chat after that particular class had been that vampires actually don't die, they are immortal and that is why they have never been able to study a corpse. As I stood examining the face in the mirror, I remembered the fireside stories from camp that told how vampires are born as vampires and live human life-spans, like a parallel world. At girlhood sleepovers the consensus had been that every vampire chooses a human mate, who becomes a vampire through some vague process - a conversation that left us giggling, I recalled. I didn't feel like giggling right now, but couldn't fail



to notice the droll touch of a smile on my vampire face in the mirror.

My mind listed off the endless and contradictory theories I had heard: Vampires turn to ash in the light of day, sunlight has no effect on vampires, or is it that the sun makes them sparkle? They kill their victims, all their victims become vampires, vampires seduce willing donors and just need a little taste. My mother believes that vampires have no reflection and my father swears they can travel in shadows. My own pet legend was that they could morph into a bat and a wolf.

I closed my eyes and concentrated on the idea of a wolf, of my body becoming a wolf.

I opened my eyes.

No change, no change at all.

I had to try.

*The vampire in the mirror is laughing at me.* The thought burst me out of denial and landed me squarely in anger. *How could this have happened to me?* I wondered, imagining evil creatures stalking through the night, looking for an innocent victim. But I didn't go places alone or take silly risks. I knew a little bit of self-defense. I even carried garlic and pepper mace - *good for anything that attacks except bigfoot!* - it claimed. I was careful and I didn't take chances that could lead to this.

*And yet here you are.*

And yet here I was. I let out a long breath. I couldn't change it. I could not wish it away. I had no idea how this had happened, or why, or even where and maybe I never would. That was the simple truth.

*I need to go home.* I thought, a primal instinct to return to safety.

The flushing from the high-heeled lady in the stall brought that thought to action: I was going home. I quickly brushed my hair back in front of my face, breathing in the scent of it to ground myself. I

raised the hood of my sweatshirt. The mirror showed me a caricature of grunge/emo, nothing that would draw attention in Seattle.

*Seattle*, I thought as I scurried out of the bathroom. *I need to get home to Seattle, but where am I?* Conveniently, the sign over the exit doors said, Thank You for Visiting Your Kent Fred Meyers.

*Kent?* I wondered. *What a strange place to be, for human or vampire.* The little town was about half an hour south of Seattle and boasted little except being equidistant from Seattle and Tacoma. I didn't even know anyone who lived in Kent.

*How did I get here?* I wondered as I made my way to the bus stop across the road. I didn't just mean Kent.

## Chapter 4



### The Shadow Waiting

He waited patiently outside the Fred Meyer, across the street. Standing still in the trees beside the sidewalk, he was unseen to all those wandering by and to the crowd stopped and milling at the bus stop a dozen feet down from him. He himself had never had occasion to step foot in a Fred Meyer and he wondered what the newly awakened child was doing in there.

He battled the desire to action with long gathered patience. He wanted to go into that strange place and find her and help her. Every moment he was on the verge of abandoning the vigil, despite knowing that the moment of action had not yet come. She had to do this part alone.

When she finally emerged, he could see the slightest flush that told him she had fed the Thirst. She walked right past him, unseeing and inside herself again, and he could smell the beef blood.

*Smart.* He thought again, elated at her cunning and resourcefulness. Elated that his inaction had been the right move.

He watched her as she studied the bus schedule posted on the pole, seemingly undaunted by the press of people surrounding her, though he knew from experience that the Thirst, unsated despite the animal blood, must be pressing at her and threatening to overpower her still. By chance, the bus that she needed pulled up immediately, and he watched her isolate herself from the crowd on the moving cell.

*She really could be....* He left thought unfinished. He would not speak his hope even to himself in the privacy of his mind. Even so, he was shocked that it could be true, and further shocked that he had thought it could not be true. She had to make it through this first difficult time. She had to.

The dark shadow of a man stepped further back into the shadow of the trees and rose, still unobserved, into the sky towards the purple smudge of lights in the sky. Toward Seattle.

## Chapter 5



### Titian

The bus let me off at the Mariner's stadium, only five blocks from my SoDo apartment. My rooms were in an old warehouse that had been broken up by the judicious use of cinder blocks. My space is not really "rooms" so much as "room", one big one that stayed warm in the winter, cool in the summer, and included wifi with the rent. It was a bit of a hike to the University of Washington campus, where I was a student, but the metro system in Seattle is really good, and the trip took me through downtown and either Capitol Hill or the Queen Anne district everyday. I had lived there a year and a half, and I liked it.

I felt like an intruder walking into my own apartment. Throwing the lock and hanging the keys on the back of the door, stripping off my bar clothes and slipping into fresh dark jeans, a t-shirt, and a gray hoodie: It all seemed like a farce of normality. I was a pale imitation of myself, a specter, and it felt like the real me would walk in at any moment and dispel me from this strange dream.

*Thirsty.*

Just a little bit, but it was still there.

I stood in the middle of the space and looked around. Books from classes, kitchen stocked with food, pictures from a beach vacation a few months ago on the wall over my desk; none of it was relevant anymore. Like looking at toys you had played with as a child. Yesterday it was everything, today it was just stuff.

I turned about and looked again, feeling a bit like Emily in *Our Town* saying goodbye to Grover's Corners. There was a man standing in front of the door.

Not just a man: The Man. His face was the face

from the bar, the face from the flash of memory. I tried to recall, to place it, to find more information in my own mind, but there was nothing. The wall that separated me from last night was solid.

I could see that he was a vampire, all alabaster and statue still, but oddly, I could *smell* that he was a vampire, or at least that he wasn't human. Like the difference between Thanksgiving Dinner and chocolate cake. Still as he was, I could see that he was alive, somehow. As though I could see him thinking as he studied me, eyes unblinking.

I studied him back, the social convention not to stare stripped from me. He was not overly tall, but perhaps a head higher than myself, but his straight-backed stance made him seem infinitely taller and regal. His eyes seemed black, shadowed by long dark lashes. his long fine black hair was tied at the nape of his neck. Yup: Tall, dark, handsome; trifecta.

"You don't remember." He said matter of factly.



He knew she wouldn't remember. He remembered when he couldn't remember.

"You have flashes, nothing you can retain." He told, watching with his heightened senses the minutiae of her facial expressions. Those tiny muscle movements were in themselves responses, so clear. Her side of the conversation.

*She truly is strong, she might make it. She might be able to do it.*

He tried not to think of the others during his long life that had not made it. Fought not to let them haunt him as he tried to break a bit of a path for this new vampire.

"It will return," he said aloud, "with time. It is the gift of the gift. "

"You ... did this to me." She said with dawning understanding and a hard precision.

"You desired it." He told her, gently, knowing that she couldn't remember and couldn't understand how much she had changed in so short a time last night. She couldn't know the truth of it and he expected the disbelief in her eyes.

He wasn't expecting her to turn, whip a steak knife out of a block on the counter and hurl it at him, but her speed was still human slow. It was no effort for him to dodge it. It stuck firmly in the cement between the cinder blocks, though.

*Strong indeed.*

Her face spoke now only of anger and he could not read her, as he had the night before. She was closed to him through her own will, as most people were most of the time. It was the precious few that were open, and those few with whom he could commune were who he spent his time on and his time with. Open, they shared their desire, their deepest wants with him, and he could fulfill many of them. Sometimes to do so was even his own deepest desire. This one had been, certainly, and could be yet again. If she could only get through this first part.

"You will remember the truth of it, in time." Another knife, another dodge moving closer.

"That is not why I am here." Another knife, another dodge, closer.

"There are things you must know." Knife, dodge. He was almost to her, and she held now the big butcher knife, ready to throw.

*Or slash.* The dark vampire realized.

"For example, you need to know about things such as that." He turned his back on her fearlessly and pointed to the knives held in the concrete, half sheathed in the wall. "You are capable of being stronger and faster and more resilient than you have ever been. Only a highly trained human could embed a knife in concrete like that."

With deliberation, he turned back to her and put his hand down on the counter and gestured to her knife and to his hand. Her confusion was evident as she looked from the knife to his graceful white hand. He made a stabbing motion, telling her through his simple sign to stab his hand and her eyes went wide looking in his. She shifted her gaze to the knife in the wall. He watched, impassive, as an eyebrow raised as she considered the fact that he was inviting her to hurt him, after dodging the knives she had been throwing at his chest.

She surprised him turning the knife in her hand offering the handle to him.

He caught her gray eyes and held them as he slowly took the knife. He could see in those eyes a trace of fear, a fair amount of defiance, a readiness to act, a wariness, but mostly defiance. She would not do this thing, but his word would be tested in this thing.

His own eyes were open, dark orbs, inviting her and amused by her as he accepted the blade.

The knife moved with all his speed to bury in his hand, and far into the countertop. She made a small involuntary “eep” noise, but did not make a move. Blood swelled around the wound and gushed out when he removed the knife. He held up the hand with blood running down his arm, soaking to be unseen in the black cuff of his sleeve. The flow slowed as the wound closed. They both watched in silence for the few minutes it took until his hand was whole and unblemished, save for the drying blood.

He knew she could smell the coppery and enticing rich smell of his blood. He knew that she still Thirsted after the scant meal of animal blood, but she made no move toward the hand.

Lightning quickly, he grabbed with his free hand, pinning her wrist on the counter - back side down - and slashed her palm with the knife, then released her. She cried out and her ginger hair flew as she jumped back from him. She turned instinctively to the sink before she looked down at the hand and - frozen - watched as her own skin closed just as his had. The thing done, and the wound healed, she licked the blood off her own palm before turning back to him without any guilt or embarrassment in her face.

He threw the knife to join the collection in the cinder wall.

"Buying the animal blood this evening was wise and clever, but it is not a diet. It is....starvation food: Better than nothing, but not sustainable. I do not know why but there is something in human and vampire blood that we must have to survive. We are more durable, but not immortal. Sunlight, fire, starvation, and decapitation will end you."

"I don't want to kill anybody." She said, with candor. The slightest gap from that sincere desire opened in her. The dark vampire allowed his empathy into that opening. He let her feel his desire for her to take the drying blood on his hand as she had taken her own. He watched her eyes as she understood what she was feeling and perhaps as a flash from the night before came to her.

*She has such control*, he thought as he watched her consider. She did not letting the Thirst and the feel of his desire within her mind sweep her away. *Such cleverness and such beauty, this ginger girl.*

"I don't even know your name." She said unexpectedly.

"Names are like snake skins, they shed away. I would like it if you knew me as Quinn. And I shall call you Titian."

She took his right hand, his bloody hand in a conventional hand shake, keeping eye contact and said, "Quinn."

Quinn felt the door of openness within her swing wide, he felt her Thirst as she raised his still held hand to her mouth and began licking the blood from it in quick, wide swatches. He kept himself open, letting his want for her to do this thing, his desire for her to survive this beginning time, and his still memory-fresh wishes from the previous night wash into her, mingling with her own desires for what she could smell and taste, her own want to survive, her wish not to harm anyone.

When the blood was gone and his hand was clean, she all but fell into the desk chair near the window, eyes closed and abandon in her face, for just a moment before she began collecting herself.

"I felt you inside my head." His Titian said, eyes still closed, "I felt what you want."

She let out a long sigh. "I know that you're going to leave in just a minute. You aren't here to take me. You aren't here to guide me."

She opened her eyes and looked at him, accusingly, closed now from him. "Why would you do this in this way? Why did I wake up in that empty place in Kent alone? And why are you here now just to taunt me and leave?" She was nearly to rage filled tears, as blinded past and strange present and the unknown quality of the future collided.

Quinn sat gracefully on the love seat facing her. He was glad she had gotten past that it had been done, and moved on to things that dealt with the future. His jacket fell away from his body and a line of small beaten silver buttons going up his shirt caught the light. He considered his words carefully, knowing too well how fragile beginnings were, this one in particular.

"You felt my wishes and my wants," he told her, "as you will feel them from all those that open themselves to you. I am not here to take you away with me, though I am here to guide you. You will recall my words in days to come and when the past comes back to you and you can look on all of this from the future, you will see the wisdom of it."

Now it was his turn to sigh. "I do not want my desires to bend you to a way



of being, I did not free you from that just to enslave you. You are beyond the life you had, the life that trapped you in its expectations. You are now whomever you wish to be, my lovely Titian. If you forget every other thing I tell you, remember this thing: You are who you desire to be, nothing can force you to be anything else."

He paused to let that all important point sink in.

"That having been said, there are things I do need to tell you of.

Practicalities."

She nodded that she was listening and Quinn went on, "There are vampires that exist on as many levels of society as humans - from the rich and powerful to the scavengers in the streets. There are fanatics and cults and societies, those that would lure you to join them and those that would kill you just for existing. You are as strong and as fast as any of them, and more clever than most. I would not tell you to avoid all others, but I will warn you to be wary. Which brings me back: Be who you wish to be. Sample all pleasures, as they please you only. "

He stood and moved to the center of the room and held a hand out to her. After a moment she took it, rising from the chair, and allowing him to lead her and he turned her to stand in front of him, facing out; facing where she had just sat. He put his hands lightly on her upper arms, turning her slowly to look all around her room, her life before.

"This is not your home anymore." He echoed the thoughts she had been thinking before she had noticed him in her apartment, "This is the place of someone you used to be who had a different life. You could force yourself back into this life, take classes by night and go out with friends wearing makeup to pass and careful not to flash fang and you could beg your family for acceptance or try to hide it from their eyes, but it would never be the same life that was. You must leave it, you must tread this path alone where you have never been alone before. I will return to you, when you have recalled how you got here."

She didn't want him to go, Quinn could feel it. He didn't want to go, he radiated back, but his desire for her not to be an acolyte was stronger. His practice at this empathy allowed him to hold back from her the desire ever unfulfilled for all those that had gone to fire or sun. Other people in other places in other times who had desired the gift and whom he had desired so fiercely and so unwisely that he had not given them this time alone. He locked away from her the desire for the

might-have-beens, those whom he had left just like he was about to leave Titian, but who had not survived or who he had never found again. He kept all that inside himself while he opened to her only his desires for her. He only let her feel his wish for her survival, for her acceptance and understanding of this thing, for their coming back together and walking the world together through the endless nights.

There was a flavor of her own desires from last night in him that might stir memories. He allowed it, but did not press it upon her. Her desires shifted: She wanted to feed from him, the blood on his hand had been only an amuse bouche and she wanted more. She was as young as they get and, in spite of all her amazing control and strength, the primal needs asserted themselves. Quinn had to close himself from Titian before he was swept up in this desire. He kissed the back of her copper head.

"Soon, Titian. Some night soon."

And he was gone, leaving her standing just as she was when he appeared.

## Chapter 6



### Leaving

I came out of my haze of Thirst alone, exactly where I had been when Quinn appeared, wondering a bit if it had been some kind of waking dream. Maybe I had totally split with reality. But the mirror on the wall told me I was still a pale blood sucker and five knives stuck in the wall told their own tale. A manila envelope on the desk was labeled "Titian" in a fancy script with practiced ease. It told me that it hadn't been a dream. This was the really real world.

The blinking light on the answering machine said that I had a message. That is right: An answering machine. I know that as a twenty-first century human - or was human - I was supposed to have a cell phone, but I just found the idea intrusive. Besides, my parents would pay for a land line, they didn't "see the value" in paying for a cell phone.

I pushed the button on the machine and threw a dish towel on the blood mess on the counter. I licked a drop that got on my finger, but resisted lapping it off the counter or sucking on the dishtowel. Standards. Right.

"Beep! Hey you, it's Andrea!" My friend sounded tired and sounded hung over, "I was just calling to make sure you made it home safe. I didn't really like leaving you at The Quill with that guy, but I hope you made a new friend. Anyway, your mom called me. You were supposed to go out to breakfast with her this morning." I groaned remembering. Mom had called to make the date yesterday afternoon, before I had made plans to go bar-hopping with Andrea. "She was worried after you missed your date with her, so she is probably

going to stop by after she is done at work. If the new boy is in your apartment," Andrea giggled, "better hide him in a closet! Call me later and tell me all about him! Beep!

*Shit.* The resounding epitaph in my mind overrode even the Thirst for a moment.

My mother had taken up nursing right out of high school and met my father when he was a patient at her V.A. Hospital. He had been wounded in Desert Storm and needed intensive physical therapy to recover. Through the course of her caring for him and him getting stronger and stronger, they fell in love; a real Florence Nightingale story, they called it. A year later, it was my mom that was in the hospital, having me. She doesn't have to work, they have enough money to live modestly, as they like, but my mother works part-time in the evenings to fill her time and do her bit and reduce some of the pressure on the younger nurses who have young kids.

The clock on the wall said it is 9:15. My mom got out around 9pm.

*Shit.*

I tossed the towel in the garbage and snatched up my school satchel. The books and detritus were dumped unceremoniously out onto the bed. I had to get out of here before she got here. Quinn was right about one thing, my mother *would* notice and she *would not* accept it. She was very chill and understanding and supportive, but she was also a firm Christian and to her vampires were devils in human form.

I grabbed up my leather bound journal and a pen, stuffed them in the bag. I was just opening the chest of drawers that held my clothes when the knocking started.

"*knock knock knock* Darling? Are you home? *knock knock knock*"

My mother. T-shirts, jeans, extra sweats, some

underwear, socks: I tried to put them in the bag in an organized way, to conserve space, but the knocking and calls from my mother just on the other side of the door had me rattled. I slammed the drawer shut.

"*Knock Knock Knock!* Hello? Darling? I can hear you in there. Come open the door, it's Mom. *Knock Knock Knock!*"

I looked around the apartment, wondering what else to take. Everything from my life seemed pointless to this new existence: Food and textbooks. The entire top of the bookshelf was filled with silly charms, a ceramic pig to put change in, a wire stand with photos held in alligator clips at the top, girl scout badges in a frame. Crap, all useless crap!

I ran my arms across the top of the bookshelf, sweeping everything off of it and crashing to the ground.

The knocking stopped.

"Oh dear." I heard my mother say. I walked closer to the door, put my hand on it, as though that nearness was a substitute for what I really wanted: For my mother to hold me in her arms and tell me that everything would be okay.

"Darling, I am coming in. Okay? Just stay where you are." I heard the keys jingle.

*Shit.*

I forgot she had my spare.

*Shit.*

I had only the few minutes it would take her to figure out which key in the dozens from home and hospital gained her entrance to my door. I had to get out.

There was no back door. No escape.

Except the window.

I ran over to the one window in the room, turning the lock on the top and heaving. It was painted shut and didn't even creak.

Well, I am supposed to have super strength now, right? I told myself and I concentrated all of my will on the window opening, putting out of my mind the limitations I was used to. Suddenly, the strain went out of the effort. Like being handed a bag full of feathers when you were expecting a bag full of rocks, it just wasn't as hard as I thought it should be. The window flew up. The paint peeled irregularly from the sill and left it a snaggle tooth maw of an opening.

I looked down. My apartment is on the third floor of the warehouse and there is no fire escape, just a long drop. I tried not to think about it as I ran back to get my bag from next to the bookshelf. On impulse, I grabbed the small book *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran off the top shelf and ripped a family photo of me, my younger sister and brother, mom, and dad from one of the alligator clips now on in the wreckage on the floor and jammed it into the bag.

"I have it, darling. It will be just a second. Hang on." Came my mother's muttering from the door. I could hear the tumblers in the lock.

I sat on the sill, hunched under the window raised above me and looked down again. I looked at the hand that had been wounded and was now whole and healed. It had hurt. But it had healed. There was no other way. I glanced up as the knob turned.

Just as I was about to let myself fall, my eyes caught on the manila envelope with the name "Titian" inscribed on it. I leaned back into the room to grab it as the door started to swing open. I pushed off from the desk, holding the envelope to my chest as I fell sideways out the window.

You would think that three stories would be a long fall, but it is not. It is an incredibly short fall, an incredibly fast short fall. Before I had any time to consider how I should land to do the least amount of damage to myself, I was on the ground and the damage

was done.

I landed on my left side, with my bag cushioning my hip. It didn't cushion my ribs, left arm, left shoulder, or my head, which bounced off the pavement after everything else had cracked and snapped. I just laid there a moment, trying to catch my breath and a little bit sure that I was going to die.

I had to move. My mom would be in the apartment by now, and if she looked out the window.... Well, it would be even worse than if she had found me in the apartment. I pushed myself up slowly with my undamaged right arm. I rolled my shoulder and felt it pop back into place. Breathing was getting easier. Where I had landed, there was a fine bit of blood on the pavement, and more fell from my cracked head, but I was healing and my legs were fine.

I didn't try to get to my feet right away though. Instead, I pushed myself back against the building, into the shadows, hidden. I heard my mom calling for me from the open window to my room, searching for me in the tiny space. I couldn't do it anymore, couldn't hold the facade or be strong. I let the tears flow down my face, sobbed quietly holding my knees to my chest and listening to my mother above me as she called my father.

"...I don't know where she could have gone....swear I heard her in here, but the apartment is empty and trashed....something just isn't right." I stopped listening to her words and just listened to her voice, recording it in my brain like a keepsake, like a charm. I wished I had left a note, something to let her know I wasn't murdered or abducted.

An idea struck me.

I got, a bit teetering, to my feet. I realized that all the wounds had healed during my grief, I was well and whole again, if a little worse looking for the wear. The teeter had been a habit of injury, not from

actual hurt or wound or pain. I hook myself and walked quickly a few blocks north, to the nearest gas station and rummaged in my pockets for a quarter for the payphone.

The pockets of the fresh jeans were empty. I didn't even have my wallet: It was in the jeans I had stripped off in my apartment.

A guy was pulling up to the pump as I made this realization and walked towards me on his way to pay inside.

"Hey, mister!" I said, "Can you spare a quarter? I need to use the phone."

The guy barely looked at me as he waved his hand in refusal, a habitual action in a city teeming with homeless and transient chronic spare changers, but he did a double take on noticing my haggard appearance.

"Damn, kid. You don't need a quarter, you need a hospital! What happened?"

I could feel his honest concern, like a door opening inside him. His desire to help. I imagined my own inside door opening, as it had with Quinn and let the need for just a quarter to call my mom fill me and spill over, filling him.

"I'm okay, really. I just need to call my mom." My voice broke and my tears welled up again, I wanted so to make everything alright. I knew that the best I could do with this phone call was create a reprise, but what I desired was for everything to be all right.

The guy nodded his head, his own eyes a little misty. *From my desire?* I wondered. I didn't have time to consider it right now. He handed me a small handful of change.

"You sure you don't want to go the ER? I'll take you."

"Thank you." I replied, sincerely and not just for the money.

Guy headed inside and I headed for the payphone,



hoping my mom was still at my flat. It rang through to the answering machine.

"Shit." I said as it beeped. "Uhm. Hi, mom. This is me. I, uh..." Before I could stumble through whatever I was going to say, she picked up.

"Darling, are you okay?" She greeted me, sounding more than a little panicked.

"Yeah, mom. I'm fine. Everything is fine. I just...um." *Shit again. What could I possibly say that would make this alright?* The whole truth and nothing but was not even an option in that moment. "I am going on a trip for a while. Everything is fine, I just had something come up and I have to go away."

"What has come up, hon?" My mom said, and I could imagine her in my room, seeing my laptop there and most of my clothes, milk still in the refrigerator and the shattered remains of the shelf on the floor.

"It..." I ran my hand through my hair, struggling with what to say that wouldn't make her worry too much. Something that wouldn't send her world crashing or spinning. "It isn't easy to explain, but it is good." I wasn't sure if I believed that. "And I love you, Mom. I will call when I can." It sounded like I had joined the CIA or something.

"I..." It was her turn not to know what to say. I let her have the silence. "I love you too, darling. Are you safe? Is everything really okay?"

"I am safe, Mom." True as far as it went: I was nearly immortal. About as safe as it gets, in a way. "Everything is okay. I have to go. Love you."

I hung up before she could respond, releasing myself to tears again. The thought came to me to call her back and tell her that vampires do have a reflection, turning my sobs into laughter. I realized that I had not asked Quinn about the wolf/bat thing and the laughter overwhelmed me until I ended up sitting on the pavement, laughing hysterically through the tears.

The guy looked up from where he was just finishing pumping his gas, concern etched on his face.

"Hey, kid!" He yelled, then walked closer when he saw he had my attention, "You maybe don't want to go to the hospital, but can I drop you somewhere else? I am heading north."

I could feel through that crack in him that he just didn't feel right leaving me here. He wanted to take me somewhere that I would be safe.

I got up, cat-graceful and brushing off my jeans.  
"Sure."

## Chapter 7



### Into the World

The guy's name was Jake. I borrowed my friend's name as my own and introduced myself as Andrea. I wasn't who I used to be, and I didn't want to be Titian.

"Where can I drop you?" Jake asked, as we puttered onto the slow moving traffic of the highway.

"Fremont." I answered. I didn't know where I wanted to go, but Fremont seemed as good as any and better then some.

Jake nodded and didn't speak again. I was grateful not to have to suffer small talk. I wasn't sure I could keep myself closed from such an open person in conversation, and I wasn't sure I could control where that went.

The Thirst was back, strongly.

I had lost a fair amount of blood, I supposed, and Quinn said that the beef blood wasn't really a meal. I didn't want to feed on a human. I didn't want to kill anyone. I wondered if I could feed off someone without killing them. Would they run and tell the police?

The thought made me laugh a little to myself. What could the police do? Hunt me down? Call Van Helsing? I wondered suddenly what the police did do for such people. *Sorry, ma'am, there isn't anything we can do. Carry around this garlic mace and try to travel in a group. Good luck!*

The smile left my face as the perspective in my mind shifted and the horror of that vision permeated me. I felt an empathy with the unknown victim in the scenario; horrible thing happened and no help on the horizon. I took comfort for a moment in the idea that maybe vampires couldn't feed without killing, maybe

that scenario never happens because they are all dead. A macabre comfort, no doubt.

Then I remembered: I am a vampire. Maybe I won't leave any behind for the police to comfort because I will kill them all. I didn't like the idea. I didn't like it at all.

As we pulled off the highway, Jake offered to take me to the hospital again. He offered to take me to a safe house. I guess he thought I was domestically abused, which wasn't far wrong: I did get hurt at home, after all. But no safe house could save me from myself. Failing all else, he reached into the ashtray in his car and handed me a small wad of cash. I accepted that and I thanked him, not only for the money.

He let me out near the Center of the Universe, a small landmark in Fremont. On one corner of the strange intersection is a sculptural representation of the solar system, with a massive pole in the center breaking off into tentacles, each supporting a massive irregularly shaped and primary colored ball on it. The sidewalk around it was a mosaic in primary with strangely shaped benches all around under the orbs. On an opposite corner was a metal sculpture stabbing into the air with guns frothing up and Lenin set amid them, more sinister for the stark relief of the streetlight next to it, casting a spiky shadow onto the small outdoor garden of tables for dining el fresco. Across the street from them both is a line of bars and cafes.

I realized as I headed toward the High Dive and noticed the bouncer sitting outside that I had no ID. A limiting thing, that. My mood preferred the blaring noise and hustle of a bar, but I would have preferred to be sitting at home doing homework all human and happy right now too.

*Tough cookies.*

I jostled my bag more firmly onto my shoulder and

walked the six blocks to the Cafe Vita coffee house. They were in Seattle long before Starbucks burned a pot of coffee, they played good music fairly loud, and always had expressionist art on the wall that really *said* something. Nothing abstract about Vita. It would do.

I went directly into the bathroom, without passing go or collecting a cup of coffee, and locked the door behind me. Ah, a single toilet bathroom. No stalls here. The light was harsh and I wondered as I caught sight of myself in the mirror that everyone in the coffee house hadn't run screaming. I was still that unearthly pale and I still wasn't used to it. The left side of my head was matted and all the way down my hair was dried red-black clumps making it look like my hair had rusted. The hoodie I had tossed on at home was a medium-dark grey and not optimal for hiding blood, apparently. Not only was the sleeve all blood flecked - I could only figure from scrapes that I had gotten on my arm during the fall - and the left collar soaked from the head wound, but there were whips of blood all over the front and back on the left side from swinging my hair about. I was a bona fide mess.

The hoodie was stuffed directly into the trash and the t-shirt after it. I looked at myself in the mirror and harsh light. Seeing my face chalky had been a bit shocking every time I noticed a mirror, but it didn't prepare me to view the change to the rest of my body.

Cell phone or not, I am a twenty-first century girl and I had used makeup since my teen years. Not your everyday, all-out user; but I liked to try something new for an occasion or for going out to the bars. I had even done a little bit of modeling for other students at the U and had my makeup done for me. I was used to changing my face and I was used to being surprised by my face when I saw it in a mirror. I had not seen my body change since it has transformed from

child to woman.

I was a moving marble statue. I had always been pretty slender, not like runway model skinny, but you could see my rib bones a bit and I had some definition to my abs. In the gray scale I" had become, the spaces between my ribs stood out in stark shadow and "some definition" had become a true washboard.

*Did I physically change, or had this been hidden there all the time, just out of sight?* I wondered.

I scratched lightly on my upper breast with all four fingers, desperately wanting it to scrape off, like makeup and find the technicolor me underneath. My nails didn't even leave a red mark.

I escaped the vampire in the mirror by rinsing the blood out of my hair. I had to retrieve the t-shirt from the bin to dry off and get the last bits of blood from my neck and shoulders. When I was clean, I looked at myself in the glass again, trying to gain some perspective. I was Alice through the glass, that was certain, but I had to admit objectively that it was attractive. I looked good like this.

I spent some of the change Jake had given me at the gas station on a cup of coffee. I didn't know if I could drink coffee anymore. Or eat, for that matter. I wasn't hungry. I was Thirsty; I sipped the coffee, it didn't taste good.

Discretely counting money always seems like a drug deal without anyone to deal with, so I counted the cash right on the table. I pretended in my head that I was a daytime bartender. Jake had given me \$73. If I were a bartender, I would have been disappointed. As a homeless, wandering vampire, I was anything but. It seemed like a fortune to me.

I rolled it back up and opened the flap on my bag to put it in an inside pocket. The flap was all stiff. After stashing the money quickly in the designated money stashing pocket, I unzipped the flap and saw the

manila envelope addressed to Titian. I must have stuck it in there after my swan dive. I pulled it out, curious.

The envelope was worn and didn't feel like that paper-cardboard crap that I remembered taking home from elementary school. It felt like money feels, like linen paper. It turned slowly in my hands. There were big lumps inside. There wasn't a mark on it except for my name, but it felt old. I wondered idly if Quinn had called me Titian because he had this envelope sitting around with that name on it in his lair or cave or whatever, or if he had written the name specially on this ancient bit of something just for me.

The envelope brought back my encounter with the shadowy vampire. Everything had been happening so fast since I had woken up that I was just reacting. I had no time to ponder anything or consider or think about anything more than the very next moment. Now I breathed in the familiar smell of the coffee, putting my nose right down in the cup to shut out the human blood smell around me. I felt my shoulders relax a little, felt my brain unwind. I looked back down at the envelope.

The back was a series of buttons with string wrapped intricately around them, bouncing from one button to the next in interlocking zig zags.

That was what last night felt like to me, interlocking zig zags that needed to be unwound. I had added a few more flashes to my collection, flashes that the experience with Quinn back at my apartment had jogged loose: Sitting at a table in the bar, writing something on a napkin. I couldn't remember what or why, but the flash filled me with a great sense of longing. Another flash: Somewhere outside, Quinn pricking his finger on my newly sharp vampire tooth and showing me the blood on his finger.

Unconscious of my action, I reached my own hand up

and pricked my own finger on the sharp tooth, then sucked the drop of blood from my digit. Realizing what I was doing, a small romantic part of me felt that the action should have opened my memories from last night, like a kiss waking Snow White. It didn't. I had two pieces that were not a whole puzzle and didn't even fit together with each other. I let the newly expanded memory strobe play in my mind again.

*RING ring, RING ring. At home, getting ready to go out. On the street then with my friend, walking. A bar. Writing on a napkin. Quinn, the shadowy man, with a shadowy smile. Street after unknown street. A finger and a tooth and blood. Darkness.*

I shook myself out of my thoughts and started unwinding and untangling the back of the envelope.

"Hi!" There was a boy standing in front of my table.

He was young, maybe just this side of high school and not quite that side of needing to shave regularly. He was wearing a puffy shirt with lace running down the front and lace at the cuffs, and bifocal glasses. I just stared at him, mouth slightly agape.

"Hi!" He said again, shifting from one foot to the other. When it became evident to him that I simply was not going to respond, he went ahead, "My name's Colin. I just came over from The Game too." He smiled a smile of comradery at me, then turned a little sheepish, "It gets a little too intense sometimes, huh?"

"Huh?" It was the best I could do. I understood each word he was saying individually, but strung together the way he had they meant nothing.

"The masquerade? Live-action role playing?" His words slowed, sensing something wasn't quite right, "The game over at University campus? I figured with the makeup and the fake blood, you must have come from there. It looked like you had a pretty wild battle scene!" He pointed to his own head to indicate where



I had been a bloody mess. He was starting to get truly fidgety now, like maybe he was thinking of real vampires instead of play vampires. Maybe.

It explained why the cafe hadn't emptied out when I walked in looking like Marley's murdered ghost. I didn't want to start a riot now, so I smiled at him, flashing full fang.

"I didn't know they were still doing a game there. I just came from a game in Ballard." I made up words.

The kid nodded, like he knew of a game in Ballard. Hell, he probably did. He seemed like he was getting back to firmer footing in his mind.

"Cool." He sat down across the table from me, like my responding had been an invitation. "What clan do you play?"

I put the envelope back in the bag with an internal sigh. I had no idea what that meant. I had heard of vampire role playing games, but I had never played. A few of my friends in high school got really into it and one teacher I had in college had even created an assessment system based on the character creation sheet. I had tried D&D once, and just hated it. The different races and the dice rolling and the prep all just seemed barriers in the way of a good story and a good game to me. My friends had assured me that "Masquerade" was so much better - more intuitive - but I just never got around to it. Too much to do, short life. Irony atop irony.

"Hey, uh, you say that they are still playing up the University?"

"Yeah," he replied, "it goes until 1 or 2 in the morning usually." I glanced at the clock over the counter, it was only 10:30. I wondered momentarily if being a vampire altered your perception of time. This night had barely begun and it already seemed like an eon.

The kid across the table recaptured my attention by

straightening his glasses. I could feel that he was open to me, his male desires riding on a sea of hormones, but I kept myself closed and barricaded. I let my desire not to kill anyone keep my doors closed and keep the Thirst controlled.

"Where on the campus?" I paused, thinking what else to say. I did not want the poor kid to feel like I was interrogating him, "I mean it would be a shame to waste such a good makeup job." I flashed fang again. It seemed the thing to do. He smiled broadly and flashed his own fangs; they were plastic and fitted badly, riding up onto his gums. I bet they hurt.

"Oh, yeah. It looks great." He said, making an effort to deepen his voice and sound suave.

I suddenly worried he might offer to guide me there. Lucky for me, the two boys coming in - equally young and equally ridiculous looking - waved at him, doing a double take when they saw me. He gave them a "one second" sign. His friends were here to save me from him, bro's before ho's and all that.

He looked back at me. "Go to the parking garage second floor. If you haven't played there before, you will have to be presented to the Prince."

I nodded graciously to him, like I knew what "presented to the prince" meant. Like he was the prince. I wondered if he was going to try to kiss my hand. He didn't. I think some alarm had kept ringing, on something on a deep and instinctual level told him that this was not a costume.

I looked down at the bag and thought about opening the envelope, but grabbed the bag instead and hoisted it onto my shoulder. First of all, I didn't want to open it with Colin of the Clan Whatever eyeing me. Second, I really did want to go to the Masquerade. It would be nice to be somewhere and not be worried about being outed, as it were. A nice slice of fantasy would be something of a relief. As an added bonus, I was

sure that I was not the first vampire to ever have this idea, maybe I could find some of the others that were out there that Quinn had talked about. Maybe they could fill in some of the practicalities that Quinn had neglected.

As I walked out of the cafe, I remembered again my high school friends that that had indulged in the Masquerade. They hadn't been as... um, let's say traditional... as Colin, but there had been a certain flavor about their clothes. Anachronistic, a little S&M, a little romantic. I needed to go shopping.



There are only a few places that you can shop for clothes after 10pm. Seattle is not a city that never sleeps, we like our rest. If it had been a Wednesday night, I would have been stuck with the jeans and my hoodie. Lucky for me, it was a Saturday night and there are a few shops between Fremont and the U district that cater to the night freaks.

The girl in the shop was leaning casually, elbows on the counter, watching the people walking by on the street with living, interested, and amused eyes. She sported purple and black striped hair and the piercings in her ears stretched the lobes into mini-saucers. In essence, she looked like an anime made flesh. She studied me appraisingly when I walked in and seemed to find something she approved of in my face. Maybe it was the hair.

"Not dressed up and somewhere to go?" She asked, taking a round lollipop out of her mouth to talk. It was purple, and it had made her tongue purple. Color coordination.

"Yeah." I was glad she had summed it up so succinctly.

"Do you know what you are looking for?" She asked.

I struggled to find words for what I wanted. She must have seen my lack of words because she asked, "Where are you going?"

"Oh. Right. I am heading to the vampire game. I, uh, I haven't played before." I finished lamely.

She sucked on the lollipop a few minutes considering. She walked slowly all the way around me, moving like a cat.

"I thought you must be. Your makeup is really good. What clan are you playing?"

*Would everyone ask me that?*

"I don't know. Never played before, remember." My tone was a little flirty. Something about this girl made me feel giddy, and safe, and a little naughty.

"Hmm. I think you should play a Tory. Lovers of beauty. And I have just the thing for you." She winked at me and walked through a beaded curtain into the back.

I pictured a Scarlet O'Hara crinoline style dress or something equally as ridiculous.

She was better than that.

It took the two of us 20 minutes to get me dressed. By the end of it, the Thirst was practically screaming for me to take this girl, to open myself and drink down her desires and her blood. Her openness didn't help. I could feel that she found me attractive; she wanted to do more than play dress up with me. I have never considered myself a lesbian - I like boys - but I had experimented with girl friends before. I even had one pretty intense relationship with a girl my first year of college for about 6 months. I am somewhere on the bisexual gray scale and this girl was definitely attractive and adorable.

I closed my doors as firmly as possible and pushed the damn Thirst as far back as I could, and tried to just enjoy myself. She was fun and giggly, and the outfit completely perplexed me - adding to her giggles.

It started with black leggings that had a leather band up each side. The shirt looked like a long button down from my hips to the bottom, which went a third of the way down my thighs with a split in the side seam that ran up to my hip. Above my hips, it became a snug, tailored thing with small black and copper buttons up the center of the front. Instead of continuing up to a collar, it cut off in a low, square neckline. The straps clung to my shoulders with a little band of fashion rubber on the inside giving them grip. The sleeves were translucent, coming off the straps they poofed a little, came back in on my biceps, poofed a little, came back in on my upper forearm, poofed a little, came back into a long cuff. There was no lace on it, I was glad to see.

That much, I probably could have managed on my own. The corset would have had me in tears trying to suss out myself. It was black leather straps, held at critical points with copper grommets. A wide strap, slightly shaped, went over my small breasts. Thinner straps came off of that main section and went zigzagging and crisscrossing unevenly down my torso and up onto my shoulders. It managed to cover the whole neckline of the button-up shirt, highlighting the whiteness of my décolleté. The whole was held together with cunningly hidden hooks. It was silly complex to get on and required a little bit of contortion but, amazingly, once it was on and hooked in, it was comfortable.

The hard part done, my new purple and black friend tapped a finger on her lips, eyebrows furled. She disappeared and came back with some mid-calf black boots with a low platform heel and copper buttons running up the outside. As I was admiring the whole picture of this new and edgier me, she caught my eye - standing behind me in the mirror and held up something small. Without a word, she gathered some of my hair,

pulled and twisted until the top was gracefully and effortlessly held back from my face. A fine fringe of my long copper locks framed my face and ran around my head unhindered and unbound. Using the tri-mirror in the main section of the shop, I saw she had put it up with a leather and stick barrette, there was some pattern on the leather that I couldn't see, but it looked so lovely, I didn't want to take it down to investigate.

It dawned on me as I studied myself in the mirror that this outfit might cost a bigger bundle than I had.

"Do you like it?" She asked, neutral as though not to influence my opinion.

"I...I adore it. I never even imagined myself like this and it makes me feel...delicious." I smiled, showing myself just a little fang in the mirror.

She smiled with relief and genuine pleasure. I went over to my bag on a chair where I had left it and delved into the money pocket. In addition to the cash that Jake had given me, there was \$30 of money I had stashed in there at some point.

It was with no small amount of trepidation that I asked, "How much for all of it?"

She went back behind the counter and started tallying out loud and on a receipt pad.

"The leggings are \$10, they are on sale. Shirt, \$30. Leather corset is \$60. That is a really good price. It is real leather. The boots are \$50. I'll throw the hair thing in as a gift...it is the final touch that just makes the outfit. So...." She hit keys staccato on the calculator. "Totals out at \$150, plus tax iiiissss.....\$159.75."

I was grimacing before she even got to the total, let alone with tax.

"I...uh. I don't have that much with me." I was nearly in tears. Over an outfit. What was wrong with me? This wasn't normal. I tried to pull myself

together, but before I could, the strange elevated desires forced a crack in my armor.

I felt my desire for this outfit, for the new person this outfit represented to me. I felt them mingle with the desires of the girl across the counter. She wanted me in this outfit too. She wanted to grab me by the straps and draw me to her, she wanted to know if my lips tasted as good as they looked. The Thirst, like a separate being roared through the small opening and twisted her desires. It wanted her, the Thirst, it wanted to taste the pulse below the thin, soft skin on her neck. A vision of coming up from her neck, kissing her and letting her taste her own blood on my lips flashed strongly enough to make me forget where I was. My vision focused down to the girl, her neck and I moved towards her.

I walked right into the counter, bumping my knee firmly. The jolt woke me from the living nightmare, even though I was too tough for it to even hurt now. I used the pause, the stumble in the Thirst and the desire, to close the door. To slam it shut. I closed my eyes to concentrate within myself.

*Fuck the clothes. I don't want the clothes. I don't want anything.* I wanted to be closed from her. I wanted the Thirst gone.

I opened my eyes. She was looking at me in an unfocused way, a slight smile on her face.

"Mmm," she sighed, "I would like that."

Her desire was radiating out from her in waves.

"No!" I yelled. She pulled back like I had slapped her, snapping out of her own desire haze. I felt like I needed to give her an explanation. I didn't know what to say.

"No, I - I can't. I'm sorry. I don't know how to control it, I don't know how to make it....what you want and not something awful. I - I...." I looked down in shame and embarrassment and noticed the clothes

again. "I can't afford these."

I looked back up at her, hiding behind my fear and confusion and horror of what she had wanted and what I had wanted and the memory of a mutilated styrofoam container. She didn't look insulted, which was a definite plus. She looked confused, and a little pitying and still a bit lustful.

"Maybe without the shoes. I have enough without the shoes." I said, trying to restore some sanity to the conversation.

"Are you going to wear *that*," she gestured to the outfit on my body, "with *those*?" She waved with some contempt at the Converse sneakers I had been wearing.

I looked at myself in the mirror and looked over at the black high-top shoes that looked, like any good Cons, as though they had been through a monster truck rally then thrown in the washing machine. This outfit was amazing and I loved it and I loved how it made me feel, but it wasn't me. It wasn't who I wanted to be. The shoes would be the best of both worlds, the new me and a piece of who I was.

"Yeah. I am going to wear this with those." I sat down and started taking the shoes off.

"Hey," She said coming around the counter, "look, if I take 20% off the whole order, you can get the shoes too for the same price. We are supposed to start a big sale next week, so my boss won't mind too much if I jump the gun a little."

I looked up at her from pulling the sneakers on, "It isn't about the money. I mean, it started about the money, but it isn't really about that. I just...these are me. I need to be who I want to be. Do you get it?"

She squinted her eyes at me, like she was doing a long division problem in her head. I went back to lacing on my cons. She walked away and reappeared.

"Here." She said, holding something out.



They were copper wrapped black leather thongs, long enough to be shoelaces. I looked in her light blue eyes as I took them from her hand. She shrugged.

"I get it." She said, "but something has to tie the outfit together. They are only \$2." She winked and smiled a little smile.

I handed her all my money to sort out while I finished lacing them with the leather. She was right, I decided when I looked in the mirror, the laces tied it all together. Pun unintentional but amusing.

She came up behind me as I solidified my new mental picture of myself, she had my change in her hand. I asked her to put it in the bag, and she did, then she came back over to me. She bit her lip and glanced into my eyes, then started making tiny adjustments to the straps, tugging them and pulling them - reminding me of her vision for seducing me. The desire still rolled off her like waves and suddenly the Thirst was just too much. It was knocking at closed door and would become a battering ram soon.

"Thanks," I said as I whirled from her, grabbing up my bag, old clothes already rolled up inside and went out the propped open door as fast as I could.

## Chapter 8



### The First

As fast as I could run was much faster than I was used to. I zoomed down the street, the people and buildings flashing by. It seemed like I shouldn't be able to see the things around me, it was going so fast, but I could see everything. It was like everything else was going in slow motion. I wondered if the people could see me or if I was a gust of wind.

A dark and unpopulated street to the right caught my eye, it was the perfect place to let loose and not worry about navigating. It felt so good to release something in myself. I held out my arms as I ran and felt the breeze whipped at me and the pavement was solid under my feet. If I could get going fast enough, it seemed, I would take flight into the stars.

I stopped suddenly, at an intersection. I wasn't the least bit winded, I didn't even need to breathe hard, I realized; my chest was heaving out of habit. I had stopped because I had suddenly felt something very distracting. I focused on the distraction: It was someone nearby who was open beyond my belief.

Most of the people I had seen or come into contact with tonight were closed to empathic connection completely. The few that were open, were open just a little bit, a crack. Like looking out your front door with the chain still latched. Even Quinn, who had been the most open of anyone I met this night, paled in comparison to the feeling from this person here and now. *Girl*. I realized. It was definitely a girl, though I couldn't have told you how I knew that.

I turned around in a full circle and saw her. She was standing on a bridge going over the I-5 highway, half a block from where I stood. She wasn't looking at

me, she was leaning on straight arms on the stone railing and looking south, maybe gazing at the Space Needle, the unique shape in the generic cityscape.

It was like she had no door at all. She was completely open and unguarded. I walked towards her trying to understand why she was so open without opening myself. I was afraid that any opening in me would bring the Thirst.

She wanted to jump. She was a beautiful girl standing on a bridge thinking of suicide, but it didn't feel desolate, she didn't radiate anger or despair, but rather excitement and curiosity. It was so much more than that, so much more complex and, open as she was, it was there for me to know: Death had become something real and concrete to her. She was going to die anyway - and soon - from a disease. There was not a cure, there was no fight to be made. She was just dying slowly and very, very fast. She had known for a time and was beyond mourning it. What happened after that line of life/death was crossed had taken hold of her.

She radiated a feeling like the night before a big long trip. Everything was settled and packed and ready, and before her loomed a great adventure that she was longing for. Death had become as insatiable for her as the Thirst was for me.

I kept walking slowly toward her, I didn't want to disturb her or startle her into closing herself. I was entranced.

She was thinking of the people she loved, she lit candle flames for them in the sanctuary of her open mind. She hoped that they would join her in this death-adventure someday, but she was not so afraid of losing them that she would stop walking her own path.

Her longing went to the open blue sky, with the ground miles below and only a parachute keeping her aloft. She had loved that ride down the one time she

had gone sky diving. It was freedom to her, it was why she had decided to jump: To embrace that freedom. There was a small ego floating around the idea of jumping too: She was contemptuous of fighting the unfightable to the very end, of dying in a hospital bed battling for first weeks, then days, then hours, then minutes only to be defeated by Death, as a foe. She would have felt selfish burning through money and medicines, taking doctor's time and the machine that could be used by someone who was battling a disease they could beat. Her doctor had subtly indicated that in order to keep her comfortable once the pain started in earnest, he would prescribe her morphine that would be fatal if she took more than the prescribed dose. The idea seemed wimpy to her, something for a debutante or the elderly. Jumping was ballsy, it embraced the death. She wanted to embrace Death and be embraced by it.

I was next to her now and I opened myself to her. I didn't fight the Thirst: It was a part of my desire. I wanted to give her a Death, to ride with her right up to that line. I was her Reaper, her Charon. The Thirst rode this desire, it swam in it and intertwined in it. This was everything I wanted and I opened myself up as completely as she was open to me. To have this girl walk into my arms, to have me be her answer, to be able to feed the insistent Thirst without twisting and perverting desires was my deepest lust.

I could feel her moment of pause as she felt me open to her, this strange phantom that had come out of the night, a fantasy of a fantasy. And in this, her very moment of revelation.

I didn't know if it would be something pleasant or something painful. I had never done this before and I just didn't know. This would be a kind of a death for me too, I realized, but we could share it. We could walk to the point of Death together and beyond that she

went to this adventure alone. I recalled my own jump earlier that evening. The bridge was much higher off the I-5 than my apartment was from the sidewalk, but compared to the jump out of an airplane, it was the same. It had been so fast. Not flying - dropping.

I didn't hold back my life from her or any part of it. Everything I was, the flash of images that I didn't understand from last night, and everything that had happened this night was my gift to her, open for her to take or leave as she wanted, just as she had been open to the world when I found her.

I felt her desire shift, in the smallest way. I was beautiful to her, a demonic golden angel of Death and to walk into my arms was everything she had wanted in the jump. Either way it was just one step. Either one took balls and required submission.

Her skin was young and smooth with a slight darkness of ethnicity, but her face held something beyond age or race; a regality of certainty. Black hair, short and choppy blew, in the wind from the cars and trucks rushing by below us as she stood there on a mental ledge. She studied me, her Death embodied, with eyes that held no trace of tears, only a peace that made time irrelevant. She had the time she had, she did not try to rush the moment, nor hold it. She held my eyes as she stepped to me, taking Death into her arms.

She was shorter than me and, as she embraced me, I ran a hand through her hair and kissed her temple through it. We held each other long, comforting each other and letting our desires mingle together, becoming one thing. She turned her face to mine and I gently kissed her full lips. I tasted her aliveness, I tasted slightest hint of green tea, and a little bit of her sickness, and I could smell her blood beneath her skin. Her tongue flicked onto my lip, a quick wetness, then flicked into my mouth, getting nicked a little bit on

my razor sharp fang.

She pulled her tongue back into her own mouth and tasted her own pain, the little death of the wound, her lips still against mine. I started to pull back afraid the reality of pain would change what she wanted and not wanting to force this thing. But she reached up and brought me back to her with a hand on the back of my head, gentle and firm. She kissed me with the blood washing between us, almost pushing me beyond the point of sanity to a place primal. I held onto myself, anchored by a thread in a tornado.

She broke the kiss, then, and looked up at me, her eyes dark and seducing. Seducing Death. I kissed her lightly on the mouth again, my hand cupping her face. She leaned into my hand and revealed her neck to me. I kissed her jaw and I kissed her neck and I could feel the pulse beating strong in passion, beating still defying death by continuing. I licked her neck, like a cat. I tasted the salt of her skin before I bit.

Fangs sunk into her flesh and I opened my mouth wide. As soon as my fangs were out of the wounds, the blood spurted into my mouth. It was brandy and port and the finest of wines that have ever existed. It was fresh-squeezed orange juice from a fruit just picked off a tree in the sun. It was hot cocoa with melted marshmallows and it was precisely what the Thirst wanted. I let it flow into me, effortless.

The pain had been nearly nothing for the girl, who had become used to needles and tests and IV's. She pressed herself against me and held me in her arms as I took her into myself in gulps.

I pressed her tight to me, as though I would absorb her. As her fount slowed, the body involuntarily fighting Death even yet, I sucked the wound, drawing her life blood into myself. I fought to give her this death and reveled in the battle.

She floated now on wave after wave peaking as her

mind changed the feeling of pain each time I sucked deeply at her neck into a pleasure. I felt from her what a truly fine line pain and pleasure really were. She felt she was becoming incorporeal, as the feeling left her arms and her legs. The waves peaked higher and higher as she came closer and closer to that line, and I felt a haze descending on us both.



The girl laid across my lap, her head on my shoulder and her arms still loosely around me - almost lifelike. She was gone. There were a few drops of blood left, a few synaptic nerves still firing, but what she was was gone. She looked as pale as a vampire, this beautiful dead girl. I wondered if I looked rosy cheeked and alive or if I was a beautiful dead girl, too.

I had absorbed her in our open exchange, I had drunk her essence. Her curiosity for that adventure beyond the line was mine now, but I was already beyond. I wondered a little bit if it was always that way, with passion and ecstasy and understanding all rolled together with a little pain. I wondered if I would always drink the souls with the blood and take them both into and beyond the haze. I wondered if I had wanted to die last night and if that is how I got here.

That thought drove me back into the mystery of last night. I thought of yesterday, not trying to remember the night - but anything different during the day. It had been Friday. I had gone to my morning class, an applied mathematics course taught by an older neurotic fellow who was more flighty than a pixie. Nothing special happened at the U. I grabbed some lunch at a Mexican cart on my way into Capitol Hill for my internship. I worked at the boutique all afternoon,

making half cash and half school credit for business. Sent and answered emails from vendors and balanced the accounting, then helped around the shop while they got ready for the weekend. I left at 4:45 so that I could catch the 4:50 bus home. I was planning to stay in, catch up with some people on facebook, maybe read a book. When I got home, the phone was ringing and it was my mom. We made our brunch date that would never be. As soon as I put the old princess-style phone back on it's hook, it started ringing again and Andrea was on the line.

Nothing unusual. Nothing epic or really even noteworthy.

I honored this dead girl in my lap for making a choice to change and for walking the path set before her with balls. As I came more fully back to myself and out of the haze of the Feeding, I realized that I needed to do something with the body. I couldn't sit here with the shell of the girl in my lap for forever. Eventually, someone might call the cops.

I stood up, lifting her with me. She felt as light as a child with my new strength. It seemed only right and good that her shell go over the ledge as she had originally intended. The part of her that was still dancing around my brain laughed at the idea, approved it as ironic and appropriate.

The traffic of the highway was a long way down. I could see why she had chosen this overlook, it was probably the highest in the city. There was not a lot of traffic flowing by at this late hour. The truckers owned the road and they cruised fast, making speed their ally against time.

I did not just drop the body, but hurled it up and out, using all the strength I could to make her fly. The body sailed 20 feet up before turning a graceful arc and hurling towards the ground. It did not dive or fly, but fell as only a body can, limp and rigid to



make a "humph" sound on the pavement, settling almost instantly.

A car zipped by it on the left, not even seeming to notice. The hair blew in the car breeze. A truck driver saw that there was *something* in the road and made a fair effort to brake and zig around it, but it was just too late and too near. The tires on one side rolled over the dead husk and turned it into roadkill.

I heard a light girlish giggle further down the bridge, as the truck pulled over with the squeal of brakes.

## Chapter 9



### Erin

She was crouched on one of the concrete railing pillars, like a gargoyle, looking over the edge and down to the spectacle I had created. Her hair was blond, short, twisted and kinked into irregular spikes. She was small and I would have guessed her to be 14 or 15 years old, if I hadn't been able to smell the sweet, thick smell of the vampire about her.

The smell didn't bring the Thirst. It was well sated and I was free from it for a time. In probing at the Thirst, I realized that all of my mental doors were still wide open and swinging in the wind. I quickly shut them.

The girl spun, still in a crouch on the pillar.

"Shut yourself up like a clam, child, but the whole city must have heard your life story." She said in a lilting voice, head tilted, bright blue eyes peering curiously at me.

Her manner was so strange that I could put no age to her at all. She might have been a just minted vampire and, indeed, 15 years old, or she might have been 150 years old.

*How could I even guess how old a vampire is? I asked myself. I wonder how old Quinn is.*

I pushed that thought aside and considered her comment. I hadn't been able to sense the suicide girl until I was nearly on top of her, but I was also about as novice as they get. Maybe the whole city's worth of strong vampires and sensitives did know my life story, but there was nothing I could do about that now. This vampire girl was claiming that she did and she was here and now.

"Poor souls that choose to listen," I said, "not

much of a tale."

"There are those who would come a-running to a new night child," she responded, "just to have dessert or claim a notch." She smiled broadly, "You are lucky I am not one such, sloppy girl. I could have had you in your ecstasy and you never ever would have even known."

She jumped high in the air from her crouch, spun a neat flip, and landed in a similar crouch on the sidewalk closer to me, looking up at my face through spikes of hair.

"And the name of Quinn is not unknown."

I reigned in the instant desire to know everything she had heard or knew about the mysterious vampire that created me. I looked away from her to consider my response and a glint and flash of color caught my eye and attention. It was a purse. A satchel made of bright colored patches, with a round yellow patch and yellow stitches emanating out from it in the center. The sun.

Ah. Irony.

Pinned to the strap of the purse was a piece of paper. I ignored the crazy girl for a moment to walk over and grab the paper off.

"All of you,

*I am not leaving this world out of sadness, but with hope. I can not put myself and those I love through death by inches, you know I have always been a tear-the-bandaids-off type of gal. Mourn that I am not here anymore with you, but don't dwell on it. Remember me and keep me in your hearts. I will see you on the other side. Mom, help Grace understand, she will have the hardest time. I am counting on you to be strong for everyone.*

*My love, always and forever, Janie Roberts*

*Janie.* I told myself. *Her name was Janie.*

It suddenly seemed very strange to me that in all we had experienced together and shared with each other that I hadn't learned her name. It had not really mattered, I supposed, her name only mattered now because it was a handle to her, a way to remember who she was. Like I would forget. It was a label for everything she was.

I folded up the note and went over to where I had dropped my own bag earlier, thinking. When I turned back around, the spiky blond vampire had the sun emblazoned purse in her hands and was rooting through it.

"Hey!" I yelled.

She spun and looked at me, a snarl on her lip.

"What is your name?" I asked.

She tilted her head, considering. "You can call me Erin. You are Titian." She smiled a little crooked smile.

I ignored the last bit and walked toward her, keeping in my head what I looked like now: Like a badass.

"Well, Erin, that isn't yours and you can't have it."

"'Tis mine, child, because you killed the one who owned it. Drank her down like a good broth and now it belongs to the one who takes it and that one is me." She reached in to the bag then tossed some lipstick and coins from it over her shoulder to emphasize her point.

"It isn't yours. You can't have it."

She laughed and zipped the top of the purse closed, holding it by the strap at arms length to the side of her.

"So now, it's like that. Well, child, if you think you can take it from me, take it."

I had never been in a fight. I had taken some

basic self-defense courses in high school and in college, but never had need to use them. I didn't think they would be much use in this arena. I put the note in my own bag and dropped it to the concrete.

I took her bait, running with sudden motion as fast as I could to grab the bag as I zoomed by her. Fast as I was, she was faster. She swung around in a full circle, and the bag caught me square in the back of the head. It was a good solid strike. The girl-vampire continued the momentum, bringing the bag down and around to hit me in the lower back, but she was cocky with the knowledge that I was new and didn't anticipate that I would have a level of comfort with my new healing powers. As she swung the bag to hit my spine, I brought my arm around to hit her with the back of my fist, throwing my whole body and effort into the strike.

Her eyes widened right before my fist landed, but there was little she could do to prevent it connecting. She started to duck, so the strike landed on her forehead rather than her nose, but the impact was solid and knocked her to the ground.

I let my momentum carry me to fall down on top of her, kneeling on her lower chest and abdomen. There was blood on her forehead, but the wound was already closed. The bag had landed under her and her right hand was tangled in the strap, useless. She struck out with her left hand, punching at my abdomen and scratching uselessly at my legging enclosed legs, while trying to get a grip with her feet enough to buck me off. I punched her again on the cheek to stun her and give myself a space to think.

I didn't want to damage the girl, but I didn't want her to take the handbag either. Especially after seeing her note, I wanted her family to have the solace of her things and the whatever meager amount of money she might have in the bank. I needed to get this

vampire-girl to surrender, somehow.

An idea struck me, based on years of watching vampire television shows and movies. Not the best basis for an idea in the really real world, but it was all I had.

Ignoring her as she resumed punching and scratching, I reached behind and pulled the wooden skewer out of my hair. I held it firmly in my fist with one hand, as I caught her wrist with the other hand and pinned it to the ground, bringing my face close to hers and the sharp wood right above her heart.

"Is the handbag and whatever might be in it worth dying over?" I asked in a quiet, calm voice.

I convinced a small part of myself that I wanted to kill her. That this girl was a dangerous pain in the ass. She couldn't help me, probably wouldn't help me if she could and she knew too much about me. I opened the part of my self that believed that to her, only letting that tiny thread of desire to kill out. In the back of my head, I sincerely hoped that "vampires can be killed by wooden stakes" was more true than "vampires have no reflection." If not, I was going to have to run and hope I was faster. I doubted it.

She stilled under me, going limp.

"I'll not fight you further." She said quietly, with a hint of respect and a dash of anger in her voice, all laced with rivulets of fear. The fear smelled like icing on cake.

"Here is what is going to happen:" I told her in low, measured tones, "I am going to get off you and you are going to get up slowly and leave the bag on the ground. Got it?"

She nodded.

I got up, being none too careful about kneeling her further. I kept the skewer in my fist. When I was a few feet away, she slowly sat up. She didn't push herself up with her arms, or turn on her side, she just

slowly raised her torso with her legs still out straight in front of her like Dracula rising out the coffin. She pulled her legs into her chest and stood up slowly, seeming without effort. She deliberately took two big steps back away from the bag and away from me.

Without taking my eyes off her, I picked up the bag.

Suddenly she barked a laugh. As though it had opened the floodgates, she continued to laugh under her breath, shaking her head, and finally going down to a crouch. She looked up at me, laughed, shook her head, and looked down again.

Finally I couldn't take it anymore.

"What? What?" I demanded.

"'Tis only: Who'd have thought to be bested by a new one on her first night out? Not this lass, not ever did I think such a thing since my second night o' being. Who'd have thought?"

She laughed again and shook her head, then looked me in the eye.

"You must have a strength about you like the spirits give you favor, child. I know you've the gall. You've bested me by rights, girl, true as the blood and the blood is yours by right."

I didn't even know what to say. I had no idea what she meant. I stood looking at her, my mouth opening and closing like a fish.

"Huh?" For the second time that night it was the most cohesive response I had.

"The blood, girl, the blood!" She waved at her bloody forehead, "by the right of the fight, the victor who gains surrender has the right to the blood they have spilled in repayment for their energy. 'Tis the way I was taught the thing and I won't deny you because you don't know. Erin has her honor."

"I am not Thirsty." I said. Without the Thirst to

drive me, I found the idea repulsive.

"Don't be a daft fool, child." She said, rising from her crouch and coming slowly towards me, hands out placating.

I put the purse strap over my head, across my chest as she came nearer. Now that the issue was raised, I could smell the enticing scent of the blood, like an ice cream sundae after a good meal. Like fondue and apple pie. I held my hands out to meet hers and twined my fingers between hers. I didn't trust what her hands would do while I was taking my blood rights.

The Thirst rolled inside me like a contented cat wanting to have it's belly rubbed. It emanated desire for this blood, for a treat.

The bloody spot on her head was at level with my mouth, so I kissed it. I pulled back a little and licked the blood off my lips. It was hot fudge and powdered sugar and the richest brandy. I gave myself over to it and cleaned the blood from her. I sighed when she was clean again and the blood was gone, eyes closed and drifting in the euphoria. It was so little. A tease.

*If only I had damaged her more.*

That thought was enough to pop me right out of the euphoric haze. I stepped back from her and released her hands. She shivered as the contact broke.

I swung Janie's satchel to the front of me and unzipped it. Her wallet was well buried in the detritus that populates all purses. There was about fifty bucks in cash in it, along with the usual assortment of credit and debit cards and a larger than normal assortment of medical cards. I took the \$50 in my hand and closed the wallet back up, walking over to where I had left my own bag. The note from Janie to "whom it may concern" was on top. I transferred it from my bag to the satchel, while walking to the railing where she had gone over. Erin watched me without expression as I



took the satchel and tossed it down. It landed unnoticed a ways from the center of attention: The body. By now, there were cop cars and ambulances with lights flashing. The truck driver was leaning on the bumper of his rig, his hands running over and over again through greasy hair. No one had come to investigate where she had jumped from yet, but it wouldn't be long. Eventually they would find the satchel, assume it had gone over with her and her family would get some understanding and closure.

I walked back over to Erin and, without breaking eye contact, I slipped the money into her hand. I turned my back on the girl and started to walk away.

"Why are you giving me this?" She yelled after me.

I turned back to face her, but kept walking backwards. "Someone would have taken it anyway. It's what you wanted, right? It's yours. Take it."

She looked at me, that appraising look back in her eyes. I turned back around and kept walking. I didn't know where I was going. It was only midnight; the night is long when it goes from dusk to dawn and the Thirst was done plaguing me for now. Maybe I would go the the Live Action game after all.

"Wait!" The lilting voice called behind me. Then she was standing in front of me. Presto. Ta-da!

"Wait," she said. "Come with me. Meet me friends. You know nothing. The one that made you told you nothing. Come with me." She smiled a slow smile, tilting her head, "Where else have you to go?"

Visions danced in my head of Fagin's gang, but she was right about one thing: I knew nothing. Quinn had told me so little before disappearing.

"I will go with you." I decided suddenly. I immediately wished that I could just find a quiet spot to investigate the envelop Quinn had left me. I had forgotten about it until this moment. But there would be time for that later, who knew when I would get to

commune with other vampires again?

I sighed thinking, *I really don't know anything. Maybe there are vampire groups everywhere and I just never knew it.*

Erin smiled a wide, fang-flashing smile that lit up her whole face, making her look simultaneously adorable and grotesque. She took my hand in hers and started skipping - actually skipping - in the direction I had been walking.

*When in Rome....* I shrugged and started skipping with her. It was fun like I remembered as a child. Effortless tiny flights. I giggling like a child and looked over at Erin and she was giggling, too.



We skipped our way through most of Fremont, heading north. Like a ball bouncing down a hill, we started going faster and faster, skipping higher and higher, giggling all the way.

I felt free for the first time since waking up. For the first time since I could remember. The Thirst was sated, I had no obligations to bills or schools or family, I was young and I was powerful, and I would be young and powerful for forever.

I laughed out loud as a skip took us high enough to see in the second floor windows of an apartment, where a family was eating dinner. The next skip took us to a window where a young man was playing a video game. The next skip took us even higher and just over the ledge of a third floor window. I spotted a band practicing through the open window. The music followed us as we descended, raw and rough and lyrical.

I wondered briefly why this seemed so easy, to go so high and to land and skip again. We were now easily as high at the peak of our skip as I was when I dived out my window, with such painful results. I decided

not to give it much thought, as we hurled upwards again.

*Why fix something that isn't broken?*

We were coming to a more populated area and as we descended again, Erin squeezed my hand and yelled, "Run!"

We hit the ground running. She pulled me along, her inhibitions and preconceptions of possibilities more shattered than my own - still human - reactions. We were going faster than a speeding bullet. I stopped concentrating on the things around me, letting them become a blur, trusting Erin to guide us and relaxed into the speed.

In the haze of wind and blur, I felt Erin open to me. There was something she wanted me to know. Something important. The sudden sensation from her was visual and auditory and tactile: STOP!

Without thinking about it, I stopped.

"Wow." I said, "how did you do that?" Referring to the sudden stop command. She just smiled and pushed open the iron gate.

We were at a cemetery.

*Of course we are at a cemetery, where else would vampires hang out?*

It seemed...cliched. I had honestly expected a house or cafe or bar. I shook my head at my own notions and at the situation in general and followed her.

The moon was nearly full and, away from the city lights in this land of the dead, it washed the trees and grass and monuments in blue and created purple shadows. The cemetery was old, but well kept, with winding paths and new stones near old monuments.

The landmark we walked toward could be seen from the gate, jutting up above the trees and other monuments like a pyramid festooned with windows and a Russian Orthodox cross atop it. As we got closer, I

noticed the gravestones around it were marked with the same strange cross: One bar parallel to the ground, one bar askew. A set of double doors led into the heart of the monument and Erin knocked on it with the side of her fist, creating a booming ominous noise in the silent, chancy night.

"Oi!" She hissed at the door, knocking again. I could sense her opening within herself. She wanted to be let in and would not harm those within, both clear threads shooting out from the crack. Like a password.

The door opened and she leapt inside.

## Chapter 10



### Vampires in the Graveyard

Crae caught Erin in his arms when she jumped inside, swinging her around. He was a wiry looking vampire with a big head and scruffy ashy blond hair long to his ears. He spun her around off the ground as she laughed like ringing bells.

“My mad little rushing spring of moonlight, you are back!”

Titian smiled a little to herself, glad that she wasn’t the only one to think the spiky lilting vampire a wee bit insane . She still had the little smile on her face when Crae put Erin down and noticed Titian standing in the doorway. She was a vision in her strange outfit, hair roughly put back up after her tousle with Erin, the small smile on her lips like the marble statues of Venus from ancient days.

“And you have brought a stray.” Crae added to Erin, still smiling. His vampire teeth were tiny points in his mouth. Titian thought he was cute. He was open a crack from greeting the childlike vampire girl and he radiated an unconcerned surprise. Erin hadn’t brought home another vampire in decades and he was glad she had. Life lived decade on decade and past human limits grew monotonous.

*Trust Erin to spice things up.* He thought.

“Aye,” answered Erin, “ and a stray that isn’t even old enough to remember her day of darkness at that. The rest is a bit of a tale to be told.”

“Step in. Quick.” He said to the redhead standing in the doorway.

Titian did and he closed the door quickly behind her. The secret lair was secret once again.

The room was lit by a few candles on a stone railing near the far wall, a wall of tombs, cold and ancient seeming. A large stone block had been lifted out of the floor next to the railing, leaving a square hole in the floor that led down. Erin skipped over and jumped gleefully down the hole, ignoring the ladder made of branches and rope that poked out of the hole, leaning against the side.

Titian and Crae, left alone, stared at each other.

He was curious and a little cautious: They had stayed, in the main, away from other vampires for nearly thirty years.

She was not sure how vampires introduced themselves. She hadn't been very good at it as a human, in all honesty.

"You can call me Titian." She said, on impulse. It was the first time she had introduced herself by that name.

"I am Crae." He responded. He looked to be around 20 years old, but Titian realized that she had no idea how many years he had actually lived. "We won't hurt you." He said, sensing her reluctance to go down into the pit. He walked casually to the hole and cocked an eyebrow at her, "A tale to be told, eh," he half stated, half asked before jumping down.

Titian looked up into the tapering tower above her, with moonlight spilling through the windows making light blue blocks on the stone walls. She was nervous about meeting these other vampires, she realized. It was like the first day of school. She looked down into the hole to make sure there wasn't anything under and just jumped, glad she had kept her Converse sneakers.

The room below was a big empty concrete space, with candles in the middle of a circle of beanbags. Titian laughed out loud, having honestly expected a Victorian parlor to have been hidden in the lair. Or dripping ancient stones with rats scurrying along the walls and cobwebs in the corners. The only cliché were the candles, which flickered and danced, giving plenty of light around the circle, making shadows waver on the walls like Socrates' cave. The light did not reach the farthest walls or the corners, making the circle seem to float in time and space.

Two human girls sat on beanbags, one blond and perhaps Titian's age and the other a brunette and younger, perhaps a little older than Erin looked. Across from them lounged a boy vampire Roman-style across two beanbags. Erin had plopped down next to him and was running her hands through his long silky brown hair.

"This is Vex," Crae introduced the lounging boy, "Titian." He walked over and collapsed into the bean bag between the two human girls. "Aleese and Jessica." The younger girl stayed rolled like a feline, on her beanbag as Crae put a hand casually on her back. She looked half awake, but her glasses flashing in the candlelight gave the sense that she was watching everything. The blond butted his shoulder gently with her head. He petted her hair absently, still watching Titian as she took a beanbag, relaxing into it. She felt oddly at ease with them.

"Now, how did you happen to collect a stray?" Crae asked Erin.

“Well,” Erin sat up to tell her tale, “After I hunted with Vex, I wandered the Emerald City a spell and found this game where people go to pretend to be vampires and vampires go to pretend to be humans pretending to be vampires. You’ve never seen a thing so droll in all the years.” She giggled and continued, “After that I wandered a bit more, headed on the way back north and was stopped in my tracks at the strangeness of a girl and a vampire so open that their whole worlds were there for the city and the gods to see. There hasn’t been such openness that I have seen since San Francisco.”

“Are you talking about in the ‘60’s?” The brown girl asked, still in her ball and her voice sounding sleep covered and dreamy. She loved hearing them talk about the 1960’s and the small commune they had created.

“Aye, girl. The flower children had moon flowers as well as daisies. But those are tales for another time, little one, and this is the one for now,” Erin answered, gently.

“This Titian, here, was so new she didn’t remember tasting a drop and the human girl had designs to jump to the death before this angel offered her the way of the blood. And she took it too, tempted by the serpent. The vampire sitting here drained her down the the pavement. Then suddenly up she pops, lifted the body up and over the side it went anyways! I couldn’t but laugh, now could I.” And she did.

Crae and Vex laughed with her and, seeing it from this perspective, even Titian had to laugh at the absurdity. The laughter opened them all in a general way. It was not a primary communication, but another sense - like body language. Titian was still feeling a strangeness about having killed a person, however merciful the death. It colored her laughter macabre. Crae held himself in reserve, with bits of appreciation and admiration for all the beauty surrounding him leaking out here and there. Vex was pure curiosity, feeding Erin’s story telling as she emanated anticipation.

She continued, “So the jig was up for me, and no doubt about it, giggles gave me away. The voyeur was caught, til Titian got distracted by a scrap of note the jumper had left behind for friends and folks, and I got distracted by the purse she left. My! But the youngling didn’t care for curiosity from me and she made it to a fight. Bested me within sixty seconds with a fist and the threat of a sliver of wooden skewer she pulled from her hair, if you can believe it.”

Crae looked at Titian, assessing.

“Then,” continued Erin, barely suppressing her glee at the punchline coming up, “She takes the cash out of it, then takes the little bag and flings it out after the girl! Walks over, hands me the money, and off she strolls, casual as you please. I couldn’t let her walk into the night knowing only a scrap of the world. Seemed best that I bring her back to meet us and learn enough to make it through to the new moon. Best for you to meet her, the child of Quinn.”

The name fell like shattering glass in the room. Crae turned to Erin from where he had been nuzzling the blond girl, Jessica. Vex actually sat straight up. Titian recalled how she had wanted to shake information out Erin when she had dropped the name Quinn on the bridge.

This was the general reaction to that name, apparently.

“You did a kindness, no doubt.” Crae said. He looked back at Titian and asked with a focused intensity, “Why did you fight her to toss the purse?”

She looked back at him, feeling and seeing neutrality in him. “My kill.” She answered, “My call.”

He nodded slowly. As though a switch had been hit, he smiled suddenly, the same big goofy grin that made him look so boyish and charming. He looked around at his little harem of humans.

“Girls, I think it is time for you to go home for the night.”

The brunette stretched arms and legs balancing on her back on the beanbag and pouted up at him.

“Don’t send us home.” She said, earnestly, “We can keep secrets.”

“I know you can,” Crae pouted back at her, tweaking her chin, “but Jessica is nearly asleep and our talk won’t be the interesting dive into history you both so love.”

He hugged her around the waist and picked her effortlessly up over his shoulder, to her mock screams and girlie fists hitting him on the back. He leapt up out of the hole with her and Aleese followed behind, giving a head rub to each Erin and Vex, casually. She adored Crae, his fire and his intensity. But Vex and Erin made her feel safe and warm.

She stopped at the bottom of the ladder and looked at Titian.

“I like your outfit.” She said, with candor, “It suits you.”

When she was up, Vex turned to Titian. He mused on how much she



looked so like the fiery young thing that Erin had brought into darkness during their cult times in the early 70's. The resemblance made him a little afraid of her: Erin's amor had been such a fury of a girl. But he had to make contact with Titian, begin to build a bridge.

His manner was quiet and withdrawn and shy. "How new are you, truly?" He asked.

Titian was caught staring open-mouthed at the hole in the ceiling. She had felt like an impostor, a poser in this outfit but something about the frankness of that young girl's comment had made her feel at home in the outfit. At home in her new self.

"I...uh." Titian stumbled. "This is my first night. I mean, this is the first night I can remember...since...."

Crae jumped down through the hole just then, having let the girls out.

"Your very first?" He said, collapsing back onto the bean bags. He looked at her and at Erin, and they both nodded. He whistled and they all were silent a moment thinking of their own first night. "Then you don't remember the details of how you ended up here and now." He stated, matter-of-fact.

"Oh, it is a bit more than that," Erin piped in, having gotten the whole story straight from the horses head, as it were, "She has no lead up. Vampires were still a unicorn until she looked in the mirror this dusk."

"Everything that happened was last night?" Crae asked.

"Then how do you know twas Quinn?" Vex asked.

Titian felt the like the world was spinning, they were questions along with their own reactions empathically at her. She swung the door shut and they all silenced up at once, as though she had screamed.

It was Vex that broke the calm: "We have each had that first night and the waking so confused and Thirsty. We have each made that first cut into the soul to feed. But we weren't left all alone that first night. And I don't think I could best Erin now. " He added the last with a rueful smile at the girl. Vex wasn't much of a fighter, unless he was consumed by the Thirst.

"You weren't alone?" Titian asked Erin.

"I waited at Crae's coffin the whole day through and asked-"

"Demanded." Crae interjected

"Convinced, " Erin revised, "him to change me and take me away from the

shite life I had. I knew them for a spell before that night and when I woke up the next dusk in a storage box between Crae and Vex, I knew I had finally gotten what I wanted from the minute I met them. I just couldn't remember the exacts."

Crae and Vex agreed, smiling at their insane little pixie.

Crae added his tale: "I was sort of...indentured to the one who made me. I was kept by him as a blood...supply." He worked delicately around the words, but radiated contempt - for his former self near as much as his vampire creator. "It wasn't really a surprise when I woke up that day, the society he was part of was kind of recruiting at the time. I knew what I had gotten into."

Crae realized suddenly just how ignorant Titian must be. Erin had said vampires were unicorns to her, that she hadn't even really known that they even existed other than popular opinion and legend. He suddenly wondered how in the world she had known enough to beat Erin. He hadn't known about wooden stakes for years after being brought to darkness. The weaknesses weren't exactly something that was published to blood whores in the society that made him.

"How did you know about the wooden stake?" He asked.

Titian laughed a little, then pulled a little face of apology at Erin. "It was from TV shows and movies. I just hoped it was true." She shrugged, "I bluffed."

"Television shows." Vex shook his head. "Every child's education in rumors from the street packaged into half hour pills for the brain."

Erin tossed one of his own books at him, hitting Vex square in the forehead.

"And you spend all your hours with every LSD experience packaged into 200 pages." She retorted. "Tell the child about your first night."

Vex sighed a small exhale of breath, steeling himself. He had lived long enough that memories faded unless called up. He hated remembering.

"I woke up in a little inn called White's Tavern. I didn't know where I was, or how, but I was a drunk in my life before, so not knowing where I was when I woke up wasn't unheard of. Neither was waking up with a burning thirst. My father owned a plantation in Virginia. He wanted to make me the perfect son to pass his legacy onto right up until the day he died, about a year before that night. My mother wanted to find a good wife to 'manage' me, and my younger brothers had run off to play soldier in the war against the Northern aggressors."

Titian gasped involuntarily, realizing that he was talking about the Civil War, about being alive during the Civil War. Vex nodded, acknowledging her

reaction and confirming his age before continuing.

“I hated all of it - the life they were trying to hoist onto me. The heat of the fields, the management of the slaves and the smell of their quarters, my father’s false righteousness and his nerve at dying and leaving me as a figurehead while my mother ran everything with an iron fist inside her silk gloves. The girls she was trying to make me marry were either dumb as rocks or as controlling as she was.

“I digress.

“When I woke that first day of darkness, there was a battle finishing up in the dusk, a big battle. I still don’t know if he took me there because of the battle or if it was just happenstance. Most people remember the night the blood takes, after time. I still don’t recall all of it and I don’t know how or why I ended up in that hateful place. Regardless, the smell of blood all around, open and in the air drove the Thirst to a frenzy.

“You can imagine.” He lowered his eyes, and they all did, thinking of such a thing. Thinking of the Thirst taking them over like that on their very first night.

“When it was sated, that insane Thirst, I was laying on the battlefield within sight of the inn. A tall dark man walked up to me and said his name was Quinn. I knew him from seeing him at the pub I frequented for the last few weeks, but I didn’t really know him. I remember that he kept to himself, because I was much the same way. I didn’t drink to be social, I drank to drown the world away. Anyway, Quinn sat down in the bloody grass leaning against a tree and told me all about the night I couldn’t remember.

Titian made a small sound when Vex said the name Quinn. Suddenly she really did wonder how old Quinn might be. The unlimited quality of a vampire life struck her, but she turned her attention away from it, back to Vex as he continued his story.

“I wasn’t really surprised I had found a way of freedom from that horrible life. And I wasn’t surprised that vampires existed, the negroes kept their stories well and I had spent all my childhood sneaking around the plantation and listening to things. But I was shocked by the remains of the horrible battle all around me and by what I had done. Quinn was so open and matter of fact with me, but I closed as tight as I could with the moans of the dying still around us. I closed myself away. “

Titian had the feeling that there was part of this story that Vex was leaving

out, because it was too painful. Crae and Erin knew how close he was skirting around the edge of an abyss. They were all relieved as they felt him pull away from it and move into safer waters.

“Quinn took me with him,” Vex continued, “but I was something dead. I locked myself away from the Thirst, denying it until it overtook me entirely. I spent my nights reading my way through every book I could find. He gave me freedom from my situation, but I was still trapped by my self, trapped by the guilt from that first night. It locked me away from him, from everything really. He left me, wandered away after a while. One day, I woke and he was gone and I have never seen him since.

They sat in silence for a moment. Erin went back to petting Vex’s hair in a comforting way, drawing him back to them and away from those times. Vex had come a long way from when Erin had first met him, and she worried for him like a mother hen.

“How do you know?” Crae finally asked, breaking the tension with a question to Titian. “How do you know it was Quinn, I mean?”

“He came to me. Tonight. I woke up alone somewhere really strange and random. I went home to my apartment and he came to me there. I recognized him from the few pieces I have from last night.”

“How did you make it so long without the Thirst claiming it’s rights?” Erin asked with a sudden remembered thought, “I know from your mind that the girl was your first. I’d not think I could make it so long tomorrow, and the first night it is like a beast within you.”

Titian explained about the beef blood.

“Clever.” Vex’s reaction, speaking for the collective.

The long silence ate at Titian. She was suddenly angry at Quinn - for taking away her old life and then coming to her and leaving her. She was mad at him for what he had done to Vex. He was a sweet soul and when he talked of the battle field his eyes had become haunted things. She had thought of Quinn like a savior, opening the lock to a cage she had railed against a little all her life. Right now, she thought he was the devil cunningly dressed.

“He didn’t tell me anything really.” Titian exploded, “Vampires heal super fast and you have super strength. Sun and fire and decapitation will kill you. You have to drink human or vampire blood. A bunch of bullshit about being free from

my old life and he was gone! Poof!”

“*You* can’t be damaged etcetera etcetera and so forth.” Crae said, emphasizing that it was she, Titian, for whom these things were true for. That she was a vampire, too. “I don’t know if anyone knows much more on their first night. There isn’t a rule book or a manual for the newly nightly.”

He thought about it for a minute.

“The moment the sun peaks over the horizon, you will be unconscious until the last sliver of sun sets.” He told her, then thought some more, searching for advice that hadn’t been covered or discovered. It was like trying to tell someone how to eat - everything he thought of seemed stunningly obvious and not worth saying, but that was looking back on seventy years of living. In truth, Quinn had covered the most important points in their short meeting. Before he could think of anything else to tell her, Vex burst in.

“Is he coming back for you? Quinn?” He asked, willing an answer.

“He said that he would come back for me when I remembered.” Titian answered candidly, “He said he didn’t want to turn me into an acolyte by taking me with him and that I was maybe strong enough to make it.” She didn’t mention the envelope from him in her bag. She wanted that to be private and hers, she wasn’t ready to share it with these vampires she had just met, however friendly and accommodating they might be.

“Load of bat dung if you ask me.” Erin jumped up, “Cloak and dagger silliness.”

She spun on Vex, squatting in front of him and speaking with soft intensity. “Is this really who you want to find, Vex? This thing that let you wake to your brother dying on the field?”

Titian put a hand to her mouth at the revelation of what Vex had held back. Just the thought was horrible.

“This man left you and he left her.” She waved a hand toward Titian. “ And what about that girl in Omaha that had gone mad with the not remembering and not knowing what had happened? She killed her family one at a time as they rejected her and were frightened of her over course of a month until she finally went to the sun. And he was there and he let her do it all! Why do you need to find him, eh? Why?”

“Because, Erin,” Vex replied, quietly meeting her eyes, “because everyone I

have ever known is dust in their graves! You don't know it yet and you can't. You could still go back and find your sister alive and old. Besides, you have had us as family since you came to the moon. I have lived where night follows night in endless cycles. All the new books are retellings of the old stories. I am the new book and he is the old story and I need to know it. Is this all that it is? Endless hours to fill after the Thirst has been released and sated or futile societies and structures twisting human and vampire alike as a way to fill the time? Is there another choice?"

"If you would but find some pleasure in the blood..." Erin started, but Vex cut her off.

"We have endlessly debated that one, little girl." He waved it away, agree to disagree. "I have to find him. That is all. I just need to find him."

They sat in silence for a few moments. Titian felt like Daddy had just hit Mommy at the dinner table.

"There are societies," Crae said to Titian, rejoining the conversation having found a piece of advice, "and they will lure you and use you for their own ends and not give a good goddamn about you or anything you want. They will give you a cage smaller than you can imagine and make you their beast for whatever they need you to be. They are insidious, luring you in. You seem clever and strong, Titian, but stay away from them. Run from them, if you have to."

"What time is it?" Titian suddenly asked, realizing that it must be very very early in the morning. Time was critical thing in her life as it had never had before. Deadline was literal.

"Nearly 4am, new one, and the sun rises just after 5am right now." Erin answered.

"I have to go." Titian said. She had no idea where she would or even could spend the day that would be safe. They did not offer her to stay at their lair. Something from the crack in her armor told them that this was a thing she would do alone. There was an independence about her that demanded it. She stood up.

"I don't know if he will come back," She said to Vex, "but I won't forget. And," she turned to Crae, "I will run from them. I won't be trapped."

Erin got up and gestured her to the ascent and hole. Titian climbed up the ladder.

The sky was less filled with stars and more filled with light than before they

had gone in, Titian noticed when Erin opened the door to outside. She held up the bills from the purse.

Titian looked at it confused.

“I don’t need it and you might.” Erin explained, “I wasn’t looking for the money, I just like going through people’s things.”

Titian laughed. The strange girl was unexpected at every turn. She leaned over and licked Erin’s forehead, where the wound had been.

Erin ran a hand down Titian’s cheek, their faces close.

“We are not family, but we are not strangers either.” Erin told her, then stepped back.

Titian smiled at her, and walked out the door.

## Chapter 11



### Dawn

The light in the sky was beautiful and frightening. I looked around, as though the graves would tell me where I should go now.

*Break into a tomb in this graveyard?* I wondered. *How would I bar the door?*

I noticed most of the mausoleums had windows anyway. I couldn't imagine the desperation that would drive me to evict a corpse from its coffin and lay down in it.

*Okay, well...what am I going to do?* I asked myself. Then I answered. *Walk. I am going to walk.*

There were no more answers for me in the cemetery. I was not sure that there had been any answers for me at all. Knowing that I did not just have to hide from the sun, but that it would incapacitate me was useful to know, but it did not answer any of the real questions.

I reached the cemetery gate and looked around. Left and right both looked the same to me, so I turned left. Out of the trees, I could see how light the sky was now, that clear delineation between east and west. I was walking north and at each cross street I could see the colors changing low, near the mountains.

It suddenly struck me, really struck me, that I needed to figure out someplace to spend the day, safe and away from the sun right now. Or I would die. I looked around. Really looked and assessed. Residential for the most part. Apartment buildings.

*I could maybe hide in a basement.*

*Small houses.*

*A shed? No, summer Sunday. People will be doing yard work.*



Further up a gas station and some strip office and commercial spaces.

*Sunday. Break into an unused office? Sleep in a closet, maybe?*

I looked down the cross street, towards where the sun was threatening to rise. A small school.

*A school. Yes.*

It was a middle school and there was a window on the second floor left a little bit open. I didn't hesitate to jump for it, catching the ledge easily with one hand. I reached in and worked that stupid hand crank to open the window far enough for me to climb in, and cranked it back to where it had been. The classroom was a science lab. Biology, I deduced from the frogs in jars, hamsters and spiders in cages, and banner over the chalkboard that said "Biology is Living Things."

The school had that creepy feel that all schools do when empty: It felt haunted by the kids who spent their days here.

I started opening doors at random. A few hallways down, I found a sign pointing to what I wanted: Auditorium. It was, like every school auditorium, muted gaudy, with a flag in a corner of the stage, and no windows at all.

I ran backstage and found packing blankets folded and stacked neatly in one corner. Grabbing a few, I ran and made a flying leap off the stage aiming for the balcony. I brushed my back knee on the railing, going over it hurdle style and tripped on the first stair. Clearly this took some practice, but I had to admit to myself that the running and jumping were my favorite parts of this new life so far.

The lighting booth was unlocked and there was even a cot in it, folded under the desk, like the cherry on the proverbial sundae. I setup my nest in a dark corner, knowing that I was as safe as I was going to

be: Even if the janitors cleaned on Sunday, and even if they cleaned the auditorium, they likely wouldn't clean the lighting booth. Looking around, I guessed a janitor had never seen the inside of this booth.

Flopping down, I noticed the clock on the wall.  
4:30am.

*Huh. I guess the sun rises for a long time.*

I realized I couldn't remember actually watching the sun rise in my entire life. I had seen it from the car: The lightning of the sky and the colors fading into each other, growing brighter and brighter and then you turn a corner and the sun pops over the mountains, another turn and it is hidden again, up a hill and there he is, down the other side and it disappears. I could remember that, but I couldn't remember just sitting and watching it come up ever.

*And now I never will.*

4:36am. This line of thought wasn't going anywhere good. I pulled up my bag and remembered the envelope. I looked back at the clock. I had time.

The wound string around the buttons was gleefully aggravating, like ribbons on a Christmas present. I challenged myself to go fast, fast as I could without tearing the thing apart.

The last string released its hold and the bag sagged, as though exhaling. I took a breath, smelling leather and ink. I opened my eyes and looked inside.

The first thing I saw was money, sitting right on top. A brick held with ribbon. I flipped through it, feeling like someone in a heist movie. It was \$5's and \$100's and everything between all mixed together. I tried rough counting the hundreds, flipping through it again.

*That is over \$6000. I tallied to myself.*

It wasn't money to live on for forever, but what was when you could live forever? I put it aside and looked back in the envelope. There was a small leather

bound book, a little box tied with twine, a napkin, and a small envelope inside. I grabbed book and the envelope came too, tucked into the leather cord that bound the volume shut.

The leather cord felt like it had been oiled recently as I unwound it. The envelope came free and I grabbed it up and let the book into my lap.

*Open When You Remember*

It was a sealed modern envelope, with a wax seal pressed into the center of the back, those words written in the same hand that had written Titian. Quinn's, I assumed.

*Puzzles inside puzzles.*

I was about to delve into the other contents of the bag, when the book on my lap caught my eye. It had fallen open and the first page began:

*I am called Quinn.*

It was a journal. I quickly collected up the money and the small envelope and put them back in the bigger one, and dropped it - open edge up - into my bag. I snuggled up under one of the blue quilted packing blankets with the journal and glanced at the clock: 4:48. I would read until I fell asleep. Until the sun claimed me.



*I am called Quinn.*

*I have saved this first page for last as one should always do for journals, for how can one know what is to come when one starts on a journey? Wisdom comes from the past, just as innovation comes from the future.*

*When I started this ledger, I was not Quinn, but I have become*

him and can be no one but him now. I would not, as I write this, tell these pages true and for fact who I was. It is better that name be dead for those still alive.

I did not speak in riddles when I first recorded in this ledger. I was young and full of ideas and ideals, and the immortality of the mortal mind. It occurs to me now that perhaps the wisdom is not found in any one's recollections of the past, their distillations of what has occurred but rather in the understanding of the transformation.

The beginning is the start and the end is the finish, and everything in between is the experience.

This is my experience.

signed: Quinn

5 November 1777

12 August 1772

Sitting in this dingy and dirty office near the stinking port, I feel free as a bird. Reading the novels and looking at the paintings, you would think London would be the most beautiful city outside of Rome, but as one who has lived here months out of every year for his whole life, I can tell you the truth: It is a dirty city, crammed with passionless people slogging through lives oppressed. I have lived for the months spent in the free and wild country, or as free and wild as one gets in Britain, but duty chains me ever tighter as the years pass and I haven't spent more than a fortnight out of this foggy maze in a year. But now! I have found my way to liberty and never will set eyes on London again!

I am shipping out tomorrow in indentured service to the Colonies in America. Three years being fed and housed and clothed,

learning to farm in the Maryland Colony and then I am free in a land with more land than any man can imagine, I am told.

My father would have my hide, if he knew what I was doing, but the contract is solid and my bonus was this book to record in. (Not a bonus to every man, but a bonus I demanded and received along with ink and quills enough for the journey.) Glad I am that Father won't know a thing of it until I am safely away and the ridiculous title along can go to my brother. May he be happy with whatever convenient marriage they try to arrange for him.

24 August 1772

Not much but time and I'd have thought to have written more, but alas for a light! They have us roomed like Irish peasants in a cargo hold with not even a window. I had thought to see the ocean, but this is the first day I have seen it since embarking. Today is my day for two hours on deck and I had better enjoy it for it is the last I will see the sun for two weeks until my turn comes again.

When I revisit my imaginings of this journey from weeks past, I feel that a naive youth has been stripped from me, leaving me raw. I wonder now too if I will find the new world a smoky cesspool of city filth like the one I left behind, and all the talk of land, wide and free, a joke of the sophisticates. Regardless, I have made up my mind to hope for the best and make my way in the new world myself. The thought of abasing myself to ask for rescue from my family makes me sick, so I will simply have to stand on my own. Such resolve straightens my spine and firms my jaw, but doesn't dispel the fear roiling in the pit of me, I must admit.

Such fears don't stop my dreaming though, it is the only way to keep the darkness away in the hold of this floating beast. I

*dream of serving out my time, learning from a wise old farmer the tricks and moods of the land. I see myself leaving with my 25 acres and working to a sweat under the gentle sun, until I must rest in the heat of the day under trees near a brook. There will be a girl, someday, a beautiful lass who sees the nobility of the simple life and wishes to share it with me. With me. Someday there will be little one's running around, little boys who will learn the land from their cradle and little girls that are free to learn and be a boon to their husbands some day, unlike the ignorant chicks pecking about fashion and gossip that they try to pawn in the old world.*

*One must have dreams to battle the darkness.*



I read the last line of that entry and suddenly my world was pure light. It engulfed my vision and burned every fiber of my being until I was gone.

# Day 2



"I lost some time once.  
It's always in the last place you look for it."  
-- Neil Gaiman

## Chapter 1



### Dreams

Awake.

That was a pleasant surprise in itself, but better still, I did not feel any of the burning pain from a moment ago. Or a day ago, as it were. The clock said 9:11, so the day had passed. I could somehow feel that it was night. But it had felt like I was burning and then I was in the here and now.

I put my head in my hands. I had been sure that I was finished, that some glimmer of sun had found its way in and I was fried. Done. I wondered if that was what it was like to get knocked out.

*Did I get knocked out by the sun?* I asked myself. I imagined the sun peaking up over the mountains and throwing a big fist at me, like a Saturday morning cartoon.

But it wasn't Saturday morning, it was Sunday dusk. I rolled over on my stomach and wanted nothing more than to stay here through the night, safe and alone in

this big theatre and not worry about the next time the sun came up, but there would be kids and teachers and all manner of people here all day tomorrow. While I was knocked out. They probably wouldn't come in the light booth, but they might. I couldn't risk it. Plus...

*Thirsty.*

There it was again, as though my thought had called it. I held very still, like it was an external threat that had sight based on movement. My mind raced in my stillness.

*What am I going to do about the Thirst today?*

I'd the sudden realization that this Thirst was going to haunt me every night. Each dusk I would wake up with this need and it could not be avoided. Every night I would have to find a way to feed it. I couldn't count on finding a righteous suicide every single night, could I?

*Should I hunt the evil-doer, like some superhero?  
Kill without regard, like the plague?*

I couldn't imagine killing. Really killing. What I had done last night had been like an act of mercy that happened to help me. It had been synchronicity. It had been beautiful.

*Can I find a way to make it beautiful every night?*

I had no idea, but I was sure going to try. With resolve, I started cleaning my area. The journal was still open to the last page I had read.

*One must have dreams to battle the darkness.*

I closed the journal on that line and wrapped the cord around it tight. Back into the envelope it went. I took out a few bills from the money stack without untying the ribbon, and tucked the stack into the envelope. I did a diligent job rewrapping the cords, sealing the envelope tight before sticking it in my bag. I put the money in the front flap.



I realized, catching sight of my reflection in the glass windows to the stage that I was still wearing the leather strappy outfit. It seemed that it should have been unbelievably uncomfortable after a day of sleeping in it, but it felt good, and looked all the better for the shirt underneath being rumpled. I wasn't surprised at how white I looked, which surprised me. I pinned my hair in a somewhat tangled cascade with the leather and stick the purple girl had given me. The vampire in the glass sparkled her eyes in recollection.

*Thirsty.*

I could smell the humans who had spent hours in this small box. I needed to get out of here. I gave one last look around, to make sure I hadn't left anything and found my way back to the street.

The sky was still light in the west. L'heure bleue, that is what the french call the time after sunset but before true dark. There was a single star shining bright enough to be seen above me.

*Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight,  
I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish  
tonight.*

I couldn't think of a wish.

*Dreams to battle the darkness.*

What were my dreams now? A life of marriage, career, and children had never been my cup of tea, but I had dreamed of them anyway. I had let my mother and father, my friends, and society tell me my dreams, passively submitting to them. Now I had no one to tell me my wishes. Now I had to find my own wish. I looked up at the star twinkling above me and told it:

"I wish to remember how I got here."

The star didn't give any sign that it had heard and my memory didn't flash back all at once. I ran over my memory again, but it was the same:

*RING ring, RING ring. At home, getting ready to go out. On the street then with my friend, walking. A bar.*

*Writing on a napkin. Quinn, the shadowy man, with a shadowy smile. Street after unknown street. A finger and a tooth and blood. Darkness.*

But it ran slower; not flashes anymore, more like film clips. Like Charlie Chaplin.

*Napkin!* I remembered. The napkin I had left in the bottom of the envelope from Quinn. I looked back up at the star I had wished on, but l'heure bleue was over and it was lost among all the countless other stars in the sky.

I desperately wanted to sit down on the sidewalk, dig out the napkin and explore the past, but...

*Thirsty.*

I was not in such bad shape as I had been this early last night, but I was afraid that if I put it off, it would take over and it feed without my will. That I most definitely did not want.

I started walking without a destination.

A gust of wind blew by me and suddenly Erin was standing in front of me; like a magic trick in the blink of an eye.

"Top o' the evening to you, lass!" She said, bouncy and giddy, her face pink and almost human-like, telling me she had already fed. "The old Sol did not catch you."

She literally ran a few circles around me, apparently for the sheer joy of it. Like the eye of the storm, she was suddenly stopped behind me.

"So what is it to be? Will you submit or hunt or give what is given freely again?" She whispered.

I turned to her, she didn't step back but stayed close tilting her head with little twitches and eyes wide.

"How did you get so pink and rosy?" I asked her, dancing with her snake-like movements. She smiled, her vampire teeth long and thin needles.

"When I hunt, I hunt all night and I didn't take

what was offered me...."

I did not really understand what she meant by submit, but I left that aside for now. Last night I had quelled the Thirst by taking what was freely offered to me, and it had been glorious. I had been so scared for the last two nights, afraid that what I am would force me to become a monster, stealing lives. But every turn, I was finding my needs met without any effort at all.

*I need to just ride this wave and stop being scared of it.*

*Thirsty.*

The feeling radiating from Erin was one of anticipation, of desire. She wanted me to accept. I was curious as to why and what exactly was "freely offered" because she seemed to enjoy "hunting" from the way she spoke of it and made "submit" sound like a kind of holy rite.

"What is offered?" I asked with candor.

She grinned wider and grabbed my hand, leading me.

## Chapter 2



### The River Erin

We were back at the cemetery.

I suddenly wondered if what was "offered" was those two young girls that had been at the lair yesterday. The thought made me nervous.

*Is that why they were there? I wondered. Were they really offering of their own free will? Did Crae trick them somehow? And what if I went to far? What I killed one of them by mistake?*

I hesitated as Erin pulled me along, she was skipping again, so I was, too. Following the leader. It was strangely cathartic.

*I could always say no, couldn't I?  
Thirsty.*

I wondered if I could say no, if the Thirst would allow it. Well, I had managed the night before and I would manage tonight. I steeled myself that I wouldn't be overpowered by the damnable Thirst.

The tall monument was visible in the distance, but we were veering away from it. Erin looked back at me with a smile, she knew my confusion. I was open to her and hadn't even realized it. I explored our little bit of connection and I could sense her anticipation reach a new level.

We stopped in front of a miniature castle, complete with a round top door. It was a mausoleum. Above the door was a round bas-relief of a rose in full bloom and the family name "Rose" etched in flowing script. Erin pulled out a skeleton key from around her neck and unlocked the door, ushering me into the crypt in the silent hush of the graveyard after dark.

The door closed behind her and we were in total darkness until a bic lighter flashed. Erin was

standing next to the raised crypt lighting a candelabra full of candles partially melted. There was a small stone bench on the other side of the space, covered with a clutter of cd cases and a disc-man player, a few magazines, and makeup. More half burned candles. She had set up a living room of sorts with inflatable furniture and fleece blankets. On a prayer railing near the wall of honeycomb tombs, she had set pictures in frames and tossed odd bits of clothing.

"This is my secret place." She whispered from where she was lighting the candles. "The boys, they are my darlings and I adore them, and the world is my playground, but I need a place that is my very own a time and again."

I nodded that I understood. I had lived in the dorms my first year at the University of Washington and had lived with a roommate in that small 15'x 15' cell. Beyond that, our suite had 5 rooms filled, so the common room was always full of people. So, I had commandeered an unused basement classroom as my very own. I spend my time after class doing homework or hanging out, reading books from the library in an old armchair. I had found an apartment by myself after that year. The armchair had come with the room and had stayed after I was gone.

"I find a place for my own self every place we land and the boys have never yet been the wiser. Or perhaps it is that they do know, but leave me to it. For, sure and true, they'd be fools not to wonder where I put the luggage. The stuff always makes it back to the van, it must get to somewhere when we stop." She smiled a bit to herself, at this new thought that her 'boys' left her secret alone, but knew it all the while. Erin seemed calmer in this place of her own. Less frantic and mad, as though that were a mask she wore for the outside world. I thought that even if the boys knew that she kept a secret place, maybe they did not know

her real secret of who she was, naked and unwatched. I was in awe of her.

"Why did you bring me here then? Why show me your secret?" I asked in a whisper.

She looked at me, face in shadow, with a sad and far away smile on her face.

"Oh, there are more than a few answers to that question all rolled up together and tangled like a ball of yarn." She hoisted herself, sitting on the tomb next to the candles so that one side of her was lit in the flickers and the other was in the dark. "For one bit, you have a purity I wouldn't see broken yet. And you did a kindness last night, to be sure. You will learn to hunt in time, may be that you will find those as wants to die for all your nights and be an angel o' mercy walking the dark. Mayhaps you will learn to seduce and take but a taste, as Crae does. Could be you will be bent to submit to the Thirst one night, though I think that would break you worse than Vex. But be what may be, I would save you that choice tonight."

I still did not understand what it was she was offering. Would she hunt for me? Did she have someone here? I looked around, but if someone else was there, they were hidden in the tomb she sat on. I did not put t past her.

She smiled at my confusion and crooked a finger for me to come to her. Sitting as she was, she was eye level with me standing. She took my hands in hers.

"Another bit mixed in is that you remind me of a lass from years past." She dropped my left hand onto her leg and reached up to stroke my hair. "She had the flame hair of my island too and she had a fierce spirit like you do. After I brought her to the moon, we would spend nights drinking of each other."

Realization struck me what she was offering. The Thirst all but devoured me with the object of its longing so near and offered. I focused on Erin's eyes,

bright and blue and sparkling in the candlelight and I fought the Thirst. I would not have my decision made for me. I would not.

"Where is she now?" I asked.

"Gone to the sun, the fiery lass. Lived a thing she couldn't live with." Her pain was a soft thing, tempered and time hazed. She looked at me, pushing my hair out of my face to really truly look at me, "I know you aren't her and I wouldn't wish you to be."

Her hand that held mine turned, interweaving us as she traced the line of my jaw with the backs of her fingers. I closed my eyes and tilted my head into her hand, enjoying the warm touch of her fingers over my skin, the smell of the blood in her wrist so close to the surface, the feeling of desire radiating from her.

My own desire rolled from me without my bidding or censor; I wanted to taste her, to treasure her. I didn't want to drink her down as I had, in that moment of sublime ecstasy, the girl last night. No. I wanted to savor this. Savor her.

I had a sudden vision of losing control, of looking down to find I had drained her dry and poof! She fell to dust. Fear suddenly rode me, and it splashed on Erin like cold water. She put her hand at the nape of my neck, pulling me in 'til our foreheads were together.

"Shh," she said, quietly, "shh. That is not the way of it, Titian, that is not how it is. You could take every drop from me, but it would only put me in torpor until more blood was brought. Crae would put it rights, if that happened, and I'd not hold it against you."

I was calmed by her words. She kept talking, but soft in a language I couldn't know. Her face pulled back from mine and I opened my eyes. Erin's lips were slightly parted and swollen with blood from her lust, she watched me and seduced me with her eyes. She

wanted me to decide and she wanted me to take her.

I tangled my fingers into her short blond hair and I drew her to me. She bit her own lip as I brought her close so that the kiss was laced with her blood, a chocolate covered cherry, a honey dipped strawberry. Her lips were soft and her tongue explored my mouth, getting nicked on my fang. A trickle of blood ran down my throat and I was crushing her to me, my arms around her back.

She broke the kiss, she pulled back from me. It gave me a space to collect myself, to build a flood wall to hold the passion and the Thirst, letting it trickle out controlled rather than unleashed as a torrent and drown me and her both.

She smiled a bedroom smile as she felt the weight lighten from both of us. Her wrist raised slowly to her mouth and she bit it, a staccato movement and rubbed the blood it produced down the side of her face, her neck, and to the top of her cleavage before the wound healed itself. The smell of the blood in the air nearly burst the dam I had just built.

Suddenly a flash of memory rushed at me, blinding me.

*Quinn is standing above me, biting his wrist. I am frozen and I can't move though I want to reach up to him. All is hazy, unsubstantial.*

I nearly staggered from the recollection. Erin drew me back to her, pulling the stick out and petting my hair, hand gently under my chin, raising my eyes to her.

"Whatever it was, it will keep. It won't go away again, now it's back. Stay with me here."

She drew me into her and I left the memory of the past for the reality of the present as I kissed her again, exploring her mouth, nibbling her lips with my still human teeth and bringing a small noise from deep within her. She laid back on the stone and I climbed



up, straddling her. I took her small hands in mine and held them down beside her face as I licked the blood off her. First from her face, skipping her neck to lick the blood off sharp bones of her clavicle and following the slackening trail of blood onto her cleavage, nearly to the edge of her black scoop neck shirt. She wriggled underneath me, fighting my hands holding her down as I slowly licked and nibbled my way back up to her neck.

I let go of her hands and kissed her again. She wrapped her arms around me and I drew her up from under me until she was sitting, with me still straddling her legs. I broke the kiss and she turned her head, offering her neck to me with a small moan.

I could smell the older, drying blood on the surface of her skin and the fresh, living blood in the veins beneath. I could feel how she wanted me to bite her, feel that the pain was a pleasure to her.

*Thirsty.*

But I would not give in yet. Not to the Thirst and not to Erin. I licked up the blood drying with long strokes of my tongue, teasing her. She held onto me around my back, drawing our bodies together, rubbing her hips back and forth, panting primal sounds. I felt a satisfaction in her building passion. My own lust grew as I teased her further and further up the wave of pleasure.

My teeth sank into her flesh in slow motion. She tensed beneath me, exploring the sensation, her hips bucking as I removed my fangs and the rush of blood hit the roof of my mouth. Her passion exploded as I locked my mouth onto her neck, sucking the sweet nectar. It was intoxicating, it was like pure water in the desert. Her passion encompassed us twirled and it spun with my Thirst, making them the same, making them one thing.

The wound started to close and her passion wound down. I licked at her neck until the skin was whole

again. I kissed her neck, and her jaw, and her cheek, and finally her beautiful little mouth - a slow, gentle kiss of blood - before rolling off of her and off the edge of the tomb to land on my back on the ground.

*Ouch. Slick. I thought. Real slick.*

She peered over the edge and giggled at me. Then she climbed down daintily and laid beside me, her head on my shoulder, contented.

I pet her short soft hair as we lounged together on the hard stone floor, satisfied and silent. I thought about the napkin and the journal, sitting in my bag. I thought about the memory I had found of Quinn biting his own wrist, blood shooting from it and into his mouth, blood running down his arm. It was still fuzzy, dark around the edges, faded.

Erin nuzzled against me bringing me out of the past and into the present. I was curious, oh so very curious, about how I had gotten here, but suddenly "here" was so good that it simply overwhelmed everything else. She raised her head to look at me, a little smile on her face.

"You're a natural." She said.

I laughed a little, quietly and sighed.

"You make it easy." I responded. I felt bonded to her. Not as I had last night with Janie, the jumper. The first. Her, I had taken, as though all she was became a part of me. No, with Erin it felt like we had exchanged pieces. I wanted this to keep going, I wanted her to take back what she had given and then give it again. I could imagine whole nights like this.

Laying there with her head nuzzling against me, I realized that the Thirst was not just sated, it was comatose. I felt energized, yet peaceful, ready yet relaxed. It was the first time I had felt that way since before being Awake.

"I could become addicted to this." I whispered into her hair, off-handed.

Erin raised onto elbows beside me, a subtly twisted look on her face. She seemed just on the edge of saying something, instead she looked away with a rueful laugh. She rolled up to sit indian-fashion beside me, a far away smile on her lips.

"She said that once, early on."

I sat up too, facing her, but not touching her, not crowding her.

"I am sorry." I said, honestly, "I didn't know." I felt like every move that I made would bring up these memories and I felt really connected to Erin. Very open to her and just her. I adored her a little.

"'Tis not your fault, child. And 'tis not hurtful - just far away, now. You do favor her a big bit in some looks and manners."

"Can you tell me about her?"

Her eyes and empathy probed me, searching for a tip off that I was just being polite. She didn't find it. I wanted to know more about this vampire that reminded Erin of me and who had gone into the sun.

"There have always been those who are curious about us, some that worship us, a few who want the gift of the moon. But in the 1960's something in the world shifted, like kicking up an anthill. Crae has always had the knack for finding those that want us to find them, either for curiosity sake, worships sake, or the moon's sake and during that time we had a ranch in the shadow of the mountains and folk were always coming and leaving and she was one that turned up wanting the moon on a string.

"There was something that crackled between us always. I brought her over to the moon's light, and we were addicted to each other, and to the freedom from the Thirst we brought each other. She wanted to explore the world without restrictions, and I didn't want to leave the boys and she left in a red-whipped fury and the Thirst took her and she submitted to it

for three whole nights. I dunno if it was what she did or that she couldn't free herself from the Thirst any other way, but she went to the sun the next morning."

She finished with a shrug. There was so much more to it, I could feel, but it was without words; an untellable tale.

"Do you....hunt?" I changed the topic.

"O aye." She said lightly.

"How could you, when you were new?" I asked, almost in desperation. The Thirst was gone now, but I knew it would be back tomorrow and the next night and the next.

"You do ask questions that take a bit of telling to answer, lass." She chided. "You've sussed, I'd guess that I am from the Emerald Isle. I came to these shores before I came to the moon though, as a lass with my kin. My old da was a right ass; a drunk and worse than I'll tell you. Coming to America was a dream of happiness for him - for all of us - but when all was done and we were on our new farm, we woke up. The Isle or Iowa was all the same and he was as bad in one as the other. Worse, may be, as he hadn't a dream to keep himself betwixt."

Erin walked over to the railing and took up the picture frame there, handing it to me without looking at it herself. It was a black and white photo in an old silver frame with a shamrock in each corner. The photo looked like it had been folded at one point, and one edge was ripped up. In front of a background of flat land and a farm, there were two light-haired girls with their mom and dad. Either one of the girls could have been Erin, away in the past. Her mother had a look of a striking youth, aged and strained. Her father was a burly man, with a hard and grim set to him. None of them were smiling, though the farm in the background looked to be thriving with corn and a barnyard with sheep and chickens and a pleasant looking farm house.

Erin continued as I studied the photo, "I met Crae,

at an ice cream stand down a spell from our farm one evening and liked him for his own self before I knew what he was. When I discovered, I knew the moon was my escape, I didn't even have to think about it. Crae's way being what it is, I did not have to hunt, but suddenly we were getting ready to go away from there, from where my home was, and I...I couldn't.

"I just couldn't. I imagined myself flying off to the moon and leaving my Ma and sister worse off than before and I couldn't because I could fix it. My da was my first hunt. I needed a time when no one would see and I found it. He knew the truth and justice of it before he went, because he knew secret and deep down that he was addicted to being an ass and would never stop long as he lived, no matter how it hurted those he loved. And he did love us.

"I hid the marks with a bit of mine blood and folks called it a natural death. Me Ma and sister got insurance money and I got my first hunt."

She took the picture back from me and put it on the railing, glancing at it for a moment before coming back to me and slipping down behind me to hug my arms to my chest and speak softly into my ear.

"You were human and now you are not, and you know that and you don't know it. We live between mortal and immortal, we are both and we are neither. Humans die in all sorts of ways, from tiny germs to giant tornadoes. But their lives are so short and they do die somehow. We are a between the germ and the twister. Have you ever seen a twister?"

I shook my head, no.

"When you do, there is a bit of you that wants to run and hide in the deepest hole you can dig and a bit of you wants to run and join the storm and become part of it.

"To humans, when they find out what we are, we are the storm. And you cannot know if they will run to you

or from you until that very moment. What you do after that is something else entirely, but that moment is the culmination of the hunt."

I felt like I was on the very brink of understanding and yet understanding might as well be a million miles away. She let it sink into me for a moment.

She let me go and let the moment go, and I breathed again. She came round and squatted in front of me, that odd intensity and tilted head again.

"What did you recall?" She asked. "While we were feeding you." She clarified, with a satisfied smirk.

"Oh!" I exclaimed, the memory playing again in on my mind-screen, "Quinn. I remember Quinn. He bit his wrist, just like you did. Blood on his arm and...I don't know. It is hazy, for some reason."

She jolted with an understanding, but tucked it well away from me as soon as it occurred.

"None of the other flashes are hazy." I said, knowing there was something I was missing.

"What else have you recalled?" Erin asked, trying to shift me away. I considered her hard for space of time, wanting to know. But her question distracted my mind and suddenly I recalled the napkin.

"The napkin!" I jumped up to grab my bag, abandoned near the door. I put it on the tomb and unceremoniously dumped the envelope into the bag's abyss, the napkin floating out on top of everything. "I had a remembrance of writing on this napkin that night. I mean, I don't remember what I wrote, but I remember that I wrote something." I babbled through the explanation, suddenly feeling great respect for Erin's ability to tell a tale coherently.

I took a breath to still my mind and explain properly. "I have this habit of composing poems when I am alone at a bar or restaurant and scribbling them out on napkins. I just leave them there. When you write

poetry and read it later, it always sounds stupid and contrived. So I just leave them. Quinn must have taken it. He gave it to me when I saw him, last night, but I didn't know what it was then."

Erin stood and walked over, shifting the candelabra so it shined on the bit of napkin. It had the quill pen running up one side, the logo from the Quills Lounge - the bar from last night, and a  $\frac{1}{4}$  circle stained from the beer it had come with.

June 15

*'What is this?' I say  
my life laid before  
Replied 'Your life as it goes the proper way.'  
And I, 'But what if this is not as I wish?'  
I yearn to explore, I am destined to stray.  
Something beyond, above and below  
sparkling stars afar glow  
in the sun of day..*

"Ugg." I said, "Sorry."

She waved it away. "You are no Milton, 'tis true, but I like it." She said candidly. "Does it bring anything else to mind?"

I stared at the napkin.

"I remember how I felt that day, before Andrea called and invited me out. My mother had just called." I sighed, "She keeps talking about getting ready for the 'real world' when I get done with college. Telling me to get my exploring and experimenting out of my system. Her real world....Well, it isn't what I want. But, I look around and that is the world I see: A career and family, mortgage and car and 2.3 kids really real world."

"Lass, that real world is just a crust and you aren't a part of it anymore. There are so many others

just beneath the surface. But does the poem bring to mind anything else from that night in shadow?"

I shook my head, disappointed. "No, nothing."

She took the napkin from me and lead me by the hand to the inflatable chair.

"Sit," she ordered. What could I do? I sat.

"Now relax. Relax your mind. Close your eyes."

She put the napkin in my hand and held my wrists.

"Focus on the object." My mind flashed again to sitting at the bar, writing it. I felt upset, lost.

She grabbed onto that emotion, using it like an anchor to hold the memory. It slowed and I watched myself write the words on the napkin, drink the rest of my beer, and put the empty bottle down on the just finished poem. I watched from inside myself as I looked down the bar, Andrea was amidst a group of other students.

"Good," Erin said, softly, "What else? Focus on the napkin. Let it transcend context and settle in again somewhere else. The napkin."

The empathic entity that was Erin was touching the empathic self that I allowed outside myself. Suddenly she delved within me, within the self that I hid. The napkin stayed in my thoughts as I felt this new experience and she grasped onto it. She used it, delving into the dense fog that was the Lost night, dragging up something, clearing the fog away from it. It flashed, color and content in ultra-fast-forward, lightning and then, it stopped. It rewound as Erin held onto it and controlled it.

"Tell me," she whispered, "speak what you see."

"I am in the bar."

"Where?" She prompted me.

"Near the back. I am coming out of the bathroom. Andrea is still at the far end of the bar, near the door."

"Good girl," Erin crooned, "Where is the napkin?"



"On the bar. I left it under my mug."

"Don't tell me what you remember, tell me what you see. Where is the napkin?" She guided.

"Quinn. Quinn is looking at it. He has the bottle tipped to read it."

*I can feel the heat rising in my cheeks. I've never caught anyone reading one of my poems before. In truth, I imagine to myself that they just get thrown out, unread. Now I am watching Quinn, tall and dark wearing a long coat over a deep wine red shirt, pondering over my words. From within myself, I watch as I go for the door.*

As soon as the napkin was out of my sight, the memory cut off and Erin receded from my mind. I opened my eyes to find her squatted in front of me, her face inches from mine.

"How did you do that?" I whispered hoarsely.

"I don't rightly know. It is just a thing I can do. Some folk can draw, some can speak ten languages, that is what I can do. I was a wee empathic before I came to the moon. Touched they called it."

I looked down at the napkin. It was a foreign thing to me, the Eiffel Tower or the Sistine Chapel. It was a relic. My mind drifted to the other relic in my bag: The leather bound journal of Quinn's. Suddenly, I wanted to be alone in a private booth in a bar to read the journal.

No ID. I reminded myself. *Shit.*

With sudden inspiration I asked Erin, "Do you have any fake ID cards? Drivers license?"

She hesitated at the abrupt shift in topic before replying, "O, aye!" Going over to a corner of the mausoleum, she lifted a stone and brought up a purse.

*Does every mausoleum have a loose stone?*

Her slender hand went into the bag, and came up with a fistful of the plastic cards, like a magic trick. She went through them one at a time, laughing

occasionally or chattering to herself, sometimes holding one up to compare the picture to my visage until she found one that withstood her scrutiny.

"Emily Marr. Or Ma-har. Well, it is your name now, so you pronounce it as you like." She handed over the card. Emily Mahr, drivers license from Michigan. Birth date: January 15, 1987, so 26 years old. I thought she was prettier than me, even with the horrible DMV photo. But all any bouncer ever looked at was red hair and green eyes - hazel, according to the powers that be - it would work.

"Thanks." I said. "I think Quinn took mine."

Erin's eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Why didn't you tell me what you know about the memory? The hazy one?" She looked away, lips pursed.

"I think it is probably the same reason."

I got up to put the napkin back in my bag. Erin got up, too.

"If I explained it, it would be out of context." She came over to me, looking at me in the intense, close way she had, "I am mad at Quinn for Vex's sake. But you aren't mad at him. You trust him, even knowing what you do about Vex."

"I don't have to trust him. What he did - leaving me to wake alone and taking my ID and appearing for just a moment yesterday - it's all done. I can't change it, all I can do is work with what I have." I had a strong urge to tell her about the journal, but I resisted it. I wanted that to be just mine for a while longer. In fact, I really wanted to go read it right now.

"I am not upset that you are mad with him." I told Erin, "but I have to go." I licked her head, playfully, the spot from last night and she turned her face up, lips parted and the memory of me kissing her clear on the edge of her mind.

I took her face gently in the tips of my fingers.

Her lips looked soft and swollen, without a trace of lipstick or gloss. I kissed her lightly, enjoying the texture of her lips, something I never noticed before with anyone.

We came to the point where the kiss was either going to become something deeper or end and we both pulled away, fighting desire. She smiled at me.

"Thank you," I said, "for...." Her smile broadened.

"Come to the pyramid tomorrow night." She invited, "Crae always has some willing around and he and Vex would like more time to talk and share, I've no doubt."

"Thanks," I answered, "I will."

## Chapter 3



### The Street

Outside, the dusk had deepened to night. Here in the graveyard, there were hundreds of stars above me and the swatch of the Milky Way stood out, a ribbon across the darkness. The night was quiet. A breeze blew lightly in the graveyard trees, unnoticed by the stone monuments marking the truly dead.

It still seemed cliched to me that these strange vampires used it as a home, but now it made some sense, too. I had never really been touched by death, not really. I had been to wakes and funerals, for a distant cousin and a great aunt, to support a friend whose brother-in-law died, and once for a kid in our school who died of leukemia. But I hadn't actually known any of them.

Now death was part of me. I knew Janie, the girl from last night, as well as I knew my best friend Andrea. Better than. I knew her as well as I knew myself.

I wasn't picking out my own mausoleum, but it made sense that Erin and Crae and Vex had. They lived below the crust of the society I had always been part of. We had to live among humans, but we weren't part of the structure they created, except here, with the dead. The cliché of it was suddenly profound as I stepped through the iron gates onto the sidewalk. Out of a world where I suddenly and strangely fit back into the world where I never had.

I could hear cars far, far away, on the highway, but it was Sunday night and this was a family neighborhood and it was asleep or watching television in air-conditioned houses and apartments. I walked directionless, wondering where I would go. I didn't

know the Northgate section of Seattle so well.

I decided to just pick a direction and hunt.

*Titian, Bar Hunter.*

I ran, freeing myself to the night, feeling my senses go into that heightened state of registering and reacting. It felt like slowing down the world, running like this.

The first bar I came to had a crowd outside, smoking. It sounded like a band was tuning up. I raced through the people - a gust of wind in the night. The next bar had that stale dive smell drifting out the open door. I could taste blood at the entrance, not new living blood, but the blood of years and decades of brawls and worse. I passed it by, thankful that the Thirst wasn't even slightly roused by the taste.

I decided to get off this road and took my next left. A block down, I found the spot. It was a Thai restaurant with an attached but separate lounge and bar. I raced by it, turned into an alleyway a few buildings down, and stopped on a dime just outside the shadow cast by the building, just within the light thrown by the street lamps along the road. I squatted, putting my satchel on my legs and opening it to better arrange the contents. I took two \$20 bills and folded it into the leather shell covering my left breast. I double checked that the ID was still in my right.

*I really need a belt pouch for this outfit.*

I grabbed the rest of the money and the napkin, and started to put them back in the envelope, when I noticed a card at the bottom of the envelope, caught in the corner. I stared at it for a second, until a scraping sound further down in the alley reminded me that I was squatting there with a brick of cash held for all to see in my hand.

*Duh.*

I put the money and napkin back in the envelope. I would get to the card later. I tucked the envelope back

in the bottom of the bag and put the leather journal out on top. I was just closing up the flap, when I heard scrapping again down the alley, much closer.

I stood peering into shadows, putting up my hand to hid my eyes from the streetlight glare bouncing of a window.

I saw him.

I hadn't noticed him because he was on the ground, pulling himself by the arms. A dark lump in an alley filled with the dark lumps of garbage bags and detritus. He noticed that I had him, and started talking in a soothing, hypnotizing way.

"Old Johnny here ain't much to be ascares of, I guess. Nothing much at all. Ain't got but bits of leg left. Rats ain't no food fit to be had, no sirree. Rats and cats ain't food, they's just junk what keeps it a bit at peace. You ever had rats and cats, vampire youngling?"

I shook my head at his question. I wanted to run but I was frozen in place. Now that he was closer, I could see him: Dirty with wild, matted hair. His eyes were wide and huge in his emaciated head and his fangs hardly fit in his mouth. Lips and chin were covered with dried blood and, atop that, fresh blood from his fangs cutting up his lower lip. I kept my inner door closed tight against him, but couldn't move as he pulled himself closer, walking on his hands and dragging legs behind him that were torn and tiny. His ankles looked like tendon and bone with no skin over it.

"You are pink and smell of prime blood, girl. No human for you, no no no not for you, pretty princess had a feed on another of her stock and kind. Best kinda food to have is the kind that keeps you, not hungry later on dead blood. I think you are a club kind, a highly held whore of someone who thinks they matter because they keep slaves. We are all slaves,

you know. The world is our master and sometimes you dominate and sometimes you submit and sometimes one is the same as the other."

He was almost to me and I really did not want him to touch me.

"What do you want?" I forced myself to ask, breaking through the hypnosis of his ranting.

He moved faster than I would have dreamed, bringing his emaciated feet under him and using arms and legs to propel himself at my torso with superhuman speed. I tried to dodge, but he threw his arms out and one caught me, latching on as though he would never let go. His momentum brought him around to crash into my back, and he used it. I went down face first, my right knee between me and the ground, my left leg and arms straight out, and a crazed vampire on my back. One of his hands tangled and pulling on my long copper hair, so that my chin hit the pavement solidly. It jarred my whole skull.

He grabbed as much of my hair as he could and pulled it up. With his other hand, he grabbed a blade from his belt and put it to my neck. I had no idea why he wasn't just biting me, but I didn't like where this was going. I bucked a little, trying to get the leg under me into a good position to hurl him off.

"I am going to take your head to where I keep my prizes. I have a whole section of society whores that traded a good life for a bad eternity and I will suck down every drop of you and you will make me strong again with every drop until the Devil inside me goes away and I will be a god again and you will never know what eternity really is and-"

With a thankfulness that he was slow at getting to his point and was also light, I made my move. I pushed with my one leg, letting it drive me onto my hands with a staccato move.

He flew off of me onto his back on the pavement. I

fell, semi-gracefully, onto my feet. The blade was stuck in my windpipe. I had not felt it penetrate, but now it hurt and, worse, I started coughing uncontrollably, my lungs trying to expel the blood dripping down into them. I pulled it out, leaning over so the blood wouldn't drip down my whole body. It was long and thin and sharp, the blade. It looked antique, and French. I suddenly wondered how old Old Johnny was and why he was in this back alley, a vampire bum eating rats and cats. I held the knife at the ready, wary of the infirm looking vampire and just wanting to escape.

*All I want is to go to the bar.*

"You can't have me." I told Johnny, who was pushing himself up by his arms, still seeming dazed - though I didn't trust it. "You can't have my head and now you can't have my blood either."

I threw the knife as hard as I could at his leg. The knife went through his thigh and into the pavement, just as my kitchen knives had gone into the concrete blocks last night at my apartment.

I ran from his pain yell as fast as I could. I ran from the alley to the bar, through the open door and into a private booth in the farthest corner. Other than a few guys sitting at the bar talking to the bartender and one older gent well into a whiskey on the rocks at the end of the bar, the lounge was deserted. The barkeep was so engaged in his conversation that he didn't even notice me.

*Works for me.*

I used a napkin from the dispenser on the table and cleaned my neck, then I pulled the journal out of my bag and curled up in the corner of the three sided booth with it.



## Chapter 4

☾

### Quinn's Story

3 September 1772

*My eyes are becoming adjusted to the darkness enough to write a little without waiting for my time on deck again. I would have thought that packed together as we are, there would be much talk between among the travelers, but there is a hush brought on by the sharp sound of boots and yelling above and creaking all around. It is as though the sea itself demands our silence. Also, what commonality between peoples? Among us are the roughest scallawags to the simplest families to immigrants that don't even speak our language all crammed in the "passenger cabin."*

7 September 1772

*For such a large room, it amazes how small it can seem. The space is half the length of the ship, just below the deck. No doubt empty it is indeed quite a grand space, but now it is filled with beds, like a sick house. Some folk have trunks at the end of their bed and some have a chair they brought or other bits of furniture. I wonder if these are all indentured or if some have paid for such a rough journey. It is truly too dark to do much of any occupation people fill their time with. The sea begins to grow too rough to write.*

☾

A waitress interrupted my reading to ask if I wanted a drink or a menu. I ordered a bloody mary on the rocks and told her I didn't need a menu. She

flirted with the bartender while he made my drink, and I watched their body language from across the room. I wondered who they were, outside the roles they assumed. Hearing Erin's story and now reading of Quinn's early history, it dawned on me that everyone has a story, they all have a past and hopes for the future.

I thought of the man outside who had attacked me. He had a past, too. In fact, he was a vampire, so who knew how long his past might run. I wondered how he had come to the moon, as Erin would say. I wondered how he had ended up in an alley in Seattle, broken and mad as he was.

The waitress brought my drink and I thanked her, pulled a \$10 out of my stash place and told her to keep the change. She left me to my solitude.

I looked down at the journal and wondered how the words written here, centuries ago, had anything to do with me. It seemed completely unreal to me that I could be sitting here reading the memoir of someone who still existed, someone I had met. More than that, a journal is a place to talk to your secret self, to be true. As a teenager, I was horrified to catch my little sister reading my diary one day. Oh, how I had raged at her with all the absolute emotions of that turbulent time. I still writhed a little inside thinking of it, embarrassed that my inner thoughts, my secret confessions, and my unfettered words had been read by anyone, even my sister. Yet here I sat with this book, given freely to me.

*Why?*

I couldn't answer that, so I turned my eyes back to the handwritten words.



*12 September 1772*

*If my count of days is right, it is now a month since journey start. It should also be my day above decks, but the rotation is behind due to rough seas and storms. I miss the daylight, but I don't mind as much now as I did when we hoisted anchor. I keep my strength and constitution with simple exercises by my bed and I keep my sanity with my dreams and plans.*

*15 September 1772*

*Finally, to the sunlight! The day is bright and windy, the sails majestic against the blue sky. I forgot how alive wind feels in the hair during the weeks in the stale darkness below.*

*The last few weeks are like a haze. More and more I find myself sleeping for hours and hours out of everyday. Some of the other passengers are growing weak, their constitutions are flagging and illness is setting in. For myself, I find that daydreams and night dreams are merging together, as I spend my hours and hours planning. I have built six different homes in my mind, of wood and stone, in town and country. I have seen children of all ages, sons and daughters dreamed for the future. I have spent whole days in thought over what I would like to teach them that I know. Sadly, the more I ponder this, the more I realize how little value the things of my education will be to me in this new world.*

*I have spent hours leaving my mother and father behind me, to stay with the ocean and haunt me no more. I can't find it in me to blame them entirely: My father inherited the title and money, my mother born to a Duke and the two practically betrothed before my mother could speak or walk. How can I blame them for living the life that was given to them? How can I blame them for raising me to the same life they had been happy enough in? But still I wonder if I was born with this conflict within me or if something in*

my upbringing brought it into me.

*I find a solace in the knowledge of how vast this ocean truly is.*

*The ocean is so calm and so dynamic all at once. It stretches as far as I can see in all directions and the sun seems bigger reflected off the water. Looking around our small wooden island, it is no challenge to pick out the passengers from the crew. The travelers look like ghosts, while the crew are dark as Arabs.*

*I have thought at times to pay the captain out of my purse for a better accommodation and better meals, but prudence gets the better of me. Out here, where there are no eyes to see a man's morals are weaker than they might be in the bustling places, and no one would miss one indentured servant. Better to bear up in the darkness and keep my meager riches for a brighter day.*

*22 September 1772*

*I took ill with fever just after my day above deck. My mind keeps wandering away. I dream I can smell the fear and hope of the people around me. Taste their sins and their innocence. I feel hot and cold and then hot again. I yearn for water with the cool, rich flavor of the French Alps.*

*24 September 1772*

*It seems the fever has left me completely, though I feel as weak as a child. They tell me that we are only a week out from our destination, with fair winds. I hope to have regained enough strength that my master doesn't look at me with complete askance. My fever dreams haunt me, perversions of the hopeful dreams I spent the voyage constructing. I saw the girl I dream of with blood on her hands. I saw the sun burn a man to ashes and the ashes blown away scattered. I dreamed of a thirst that the water I drank*

could not sleep and I dreamed of ...

I can not bring myself even to write of it. I dreamed of horrors. One of the women, who nursed me while I was ill told me such dreams were quite common and not to dwell on them, but they had such clarity and continuity, it is hard not to think of them.

2 October 1772

Land ho! The cry from above. We are within sight of our destination and the journey part of the adventure is nearly over. I am glad, not just because the trip has been rough on the body, but because everything I hoped at the beginning of the voyage seems shadowed by the visions from my illness. Perhaps I can leave both dreams and nightmares aboard the ship when I depart it.

It seems that there should be some packing and preparing to be done, but for myself there is only a change of cloths and my small bag. I have been composing a note to send back for my family, that they should not be haunted by the mystery of my disappearance. Time and distance have done their work, I wish them well in their lives. I have only to finish that missive to send back to them and my affairs aboard will be settled. I am ready for the real adventure.

## Chapter 5



### In the Shadows

Quinn stood in a deep and shadowed doorway across from the bar. Through the window and the criss-cross of neon beer lights, through the maze of furniture and moving people, he had a clear view of Titian curled in the booth with the journal in her hands.

He couldn't see the book from this distance but his hands remembered the texture pressed into the thick leather even after all this time. The tactile memory threatened to take him back to the darkness of those days. He refused it, focusing instead on Titian.

He could feel that she wasn't quite closed all the way and her emotions were like a shining beacon for Quinn. It was a trick he had picked up many moons ago from a native night walker, tracking through that soul connection. He had picked her up tonight just outside the graveyard. He wondered idly if that was where she had spent the day hours.

Quinn had planned to watch her for a little while to see how she fared, before going about his own business. It would be many nights yet before she remembered; many nights before they would meet again. Seemingly to spite his good intentions, he found himself captivated watching her reading his own words. He forced himself to glance away, to the alley down the road. He had very nearly stepped in to help her when that beast of a fallen vampire had attacked her. Every city had ones like him: Shunned, feared predators, half mad. Sometimes they were hunted, occasionally they were simply avoided, and once in a blue moon they were scooped up to be used by one group or society or another, living the good life and rejuvenated only to be thrown out when their usefulness flagged only to end up in another alley or subway tunnel.

He had stood at the mouth of the alley, agape with the grace and ease with which Titian had escaped the madman. Quinn had been so entranced that he had very nearly been caught by her. The encounter again confirmed to Quinn the strength he believed her to have.

He thought of his own second night, and shook his head with a ghost of a

smile on his lips.

"I would have died." He said softly to the empty street. "Or...."

Or he would have submitted to the Thirst, he would have let it fill him and control him, with its beastly intensity focused on one thing. A shiver ran down his spine. He turned from the alley and the unpleasant memories back to Titian reading in the back of the bar. His hand reached into his pant pocket, moving with infinite slowness, movement barely perceptible. When the hand re-emerged, it gripped a small photograph between middle and marriage finger. He casually spun it from finger to finger until the image faced him held in thumb and forefinger. He shook the photo and it glimmered in his peripheral vision. After Titian left the alley and spirited into the bar, he had noticed it on the ground. Fresh and new in the old filth of the man-made crevice. Quinn looked down at it now.

Titian looked younger, maybe 17 or 18. Her hair was cut severely at shoulder level and her cheeks still had that roundness that mark teenagers as children. The photo was taken with her family, standing in front of the Christmas tree. They were all wearing jeans with bold holiday sweaters that didn't flatter, but had an air of fun and marked them as family, cohesive. Her father, a thin and wiry strong looking chap, beamed jovially from behind his children. He had one hand clapped on Titian's shoulder and one on his son's. The lad was younger than Titian, maybe 12, with dark hair and eyes. Their mother, too, was dark complected and well put together, with earrings and a hair clip that matched her sweater to make it look like an ensemble rather than spontaneous holiday cheer. Titian had her sister pulled tight in front of her. The girl was only a few years younger than Titian, other than darker auburn red hair and dark eyes of the younger girl, they might have been twins. In the midst of her family's dark hair and eyes, Titian was like a star glowing and twinkling in the night sky.

Quinn continued to study the picture as his other hand reach into his inside pocket, emerging with a locket on a pin. His fingers traced the delicate raised filigree in silver all around it and found the small latch. It sprung open. Quinn placed it gently on top of the picture.

The girl inside the locket was smaller than the people in the photograph, and she was a painting instead of a picture, but the artist had done his work well and her imago was as detailed as the photo of Titian. When the locket was painted,

she had been about 17, too, and the painter had captured that bit of youth in her. She was blond, a ripe wheaty blond with light blue eyes and a very direct gaze.

Every vampire he had known had kept a painting or a picture from their old life. It was like a childhood toy that sat around until you had a nightmare and needed a reminder that the monsters under the bed weren't real.

Quinn closed the locket and clasped it in his fist. He bowed his head, eyes squeezed shut and a quick sigh escaping as he put the fist to his forehead. The locket reminded him that the monsters were real.



## Chapter 6



### Quinn's Story Continued

I looked at the bloody mary and wondered what would happen if I drank it. I glared at it with indecision.

*It seems like Quinn or Crae or even Erin might have mentioned something about this.*

I remembered drinking all that water, right after I had Awakened. It hadn't had any ill effects. I shrugged mentally and drew the glass closer to me. The smell was off-putting, but I had never been a big fan of tomato juice, before.

*Before. Cute euphemism.*

I took a sip of the drink. I didn't retch or explode. It wasn't my cup of tea, but it was okay. I took another sip and turned a page in the leather journal.



*10 October 1772*

*I write this in my new home, in my own small room next to the kitchen, with the nub of candle before falling exhausted into bed.*

*My master is a farmer named George Hart. He collected me at the harbor near the minute I stepped off the gangplank and set me to work immediately unloading bushels from his cart to go on a ship setting off. My muscles were well sore before the long ride home and have had little rest since.*

*The Hart family has worked this land for two generations, he tells me. He and his wife live in the house he grew up in, but they themselves have no children. He expects me to work hard or he'll*

give me to the indians, he says, and I am not positive if he jests or is in earnest.

I am certain he is serious about the hard work. I spent the last week harvesting some sort of plant or another from sunup to sunset with only short breaks for meals and the darkness to sleep through. I have been thankful for every day of exercise I did on that wretched boat, for had I not I would be in sheer agony now - the good wife's willow bark tea or no.

15 October 1772

Never in my life have I been so glad for rain. Not that there isn't still plenty the man finds for me to do, but the change from the hot field is a relief. The main part of the crop I have been harvesting is tobacco, I have learned. About 1/3 of the Hart 100 acres is devoted to it. The land stretches between George's farm and his brother Jason's homestead. They work the tobacco and hemp fields together, split the profit from the cash crops, and each devote the land closest to their homes to wheat and vegetables for their own meals, as well as oats and hay for the little bit of stock they have. I have only seen the vegetable gardens in passing, as I myself have been harvesting nothing but tobacco since I arrived.

The duty has given me a bit of the lay of the land though, and I found the most beautiful spot I had ever imagined at the western edge of the tobacco fields. The plants run right up to a sharp bank dropping off three or four feet to a swift running creek. The water runs right over the bedrock, with little waterfalls and eddies twisting and churning the crystal clear water. There is a towering maple tree on the opposite bank, that provides a nice piece of shade. I believe I could watch the light and shadow through the leaves play on the water all day, if I hadn't my work to attend to.

Luckily, once George saw I had a head on my shoulders enough to pick the same plant over and over again without his watching over me, he started leaving me to it so he could attend to the garden harvest and the stock himself. So, as long as I can pull myself back to the work and get a good days worth of work done, I can treat myself to some breaks.

Right now, for instance, I am laying in fresh clean hay in the barn loft near a bit of window, listening to the rain pounding on the roof as I write. My task is to clean out the old hay and other bits from the animal pens and throw down clean hay. I finished the cow stalls, which may well be the most disgusting task I have ever done in my life. Now I take a moment for my own self, knowing that George is well occupied. His good wife had a list of rainy day chores inside the house that made me feel that my own tasks were a vacation.

I had no idea what pure labor went into a home and farm, not that I am deterred. On the contrary, more than ever I want to learn what there is to know that I might be ready when my three years is up.

5 November 1772

Thank goodness for a feast day where I might work only half a day and finally get to record the single most glorious event to occur in my life. I could not have dreamed such perfection. Even in my mental creation on the accursed boat I never dreamed of such beauty.

It was 4 days ago, on the first of November. I had prudently been harvesting cross-ways that I might find myself near the bank of the creek and take a break in the shade during the heat of the afternoon under the maple tree. There I sat, feet bare and in the

water watching the scarlet leaves falling when upstream I heard a tremendous splashing. Worried to be caught idle, I was hastily pulling on my socks, when she appeared.

I feel like a Shakespeare fool trying to describe the girl who splashed into sight! She is like a ray of sunlight. Her hair streamed behind her free and the color of the yellow leaves on the autumn trees. She held her skirts pulled up part of the way out of the water and delicate bare feet traversed from rock to rock without slip or hesitation. She was so focused on her prey, that she didn't even notice me sitting on the bank, frozen with one sock on and my shoes in my hand.

With a sudden cry, "I've got you!" She pounced down and came up with a frog in her hand and a look of childlike glee on her face. Her smile is wide and full, her light pink lips separating to show just the slightest gap between her front teeth. Without a thought, I found myself laughing with her.

She turned, shocked at the intrusion. I had thought her quite young, but when she looked at me, I realized that for all that her hair was loose and she was wading barefoot, she was no child but a lady of perhaps 18 or 19 years old. She stared at me, weighing me with her eyes, eyes that are the palest blue you can imagine, like the sky around the sun at noon, but surrounded by such lashes, like specks of gold. The frog saw it's moment and made a leap for freedom, gliding away through the water masked by the light and shadow of the tree.

"I am sorry." I said, finding my tongue, "I did not mean to startle you."

She looked back at me from hunting the escaped frog, and I found that anything more I meant to say was lost, shocked out of my mind by her gaze.

*"I know who you are." She said, walking towards the bank. Her voice is like the tones of an organ, sweet and complex. "You are the indentured man from across the sea."*

*I could only nod. Then, like a fool, I stuck my hand out. "William. My name is William." I told her. She looked a bit shocked at my extended hand, but took it and shook it with the surety of any businessman in London.*

*"Adelle Hart. But everyone calls me Addy. My father is Jason Hart. George is my uncle."*

*Panache gripped me suddenly and I raised her hand still in mine to my lips and laid the gentlest of kisses on her tanned knuckle. "Enchante, Adelle." To my surprise and pleasure, she held my gaze while her face turned the most delicate pink color.*

*Taking back her hand, she deftly jumped up to sit next to me on the bank. I tried to find a topic of conversation, but my brain seemed to be racing a million directions at once. I am not at all certain that my mouth would have worked right then in any case. So much for panache.*

*But Addy was not stumped or uncomfortable, on the contrary, she seemed to be simply enjoying the vista of the tree against the sky.*

*"I hope you won't tell my uncle how you found me," she said, "My ma and da think I am a bit old to be playing in the creek and hunting frogs. I suppose I am, at that. But what is the good of living in such a wondrous world if you aren't going to enjoy it. Don't you agree?"*

*"I promise not to tell if you don't. I am supposed to be harvesting the field. Your uncle doesn't seem to ever take a break except to eat or sleep. I do not much mind the work, but I never in my life imagined a place as beautiful as this."*

*"This is one of my favorite spots, too." She said. "But there are spots away in the woods that you must see if you like this!" She sprang back up, feet in the creek as though to take me away right then and there, but seeing the fields behind me must have brought her back to mind of my duty.*

*"I would surely love to see them, but I must get back to my task now." I said, to cover her awkward moment. She looked thoughtful.*

*"Yes," she said imperiously, "and with a right will." She suddenly came close to me conspiratorially and took my hand as though it were familiar. "For if you can get the cash crops harvested by Guy Fawkes Day, uncle will be sure to give you the afternoon off. There is a big feast in the hall in the village, but the feast doesn't start until nearly dusk so we will have all afternoon. I will take you to see the beautiful places of the new world."*

*"I - I would like that," I stammered. "Shall we meet here, say, an hour after lunch?"*

*"I will be here." She said, squeezing my hand. Then, she was off, leaping from stone to stone as swift and graceful as the deer I had seen racing across the fields.*

*And so it is that I pass the time recollecting that amazing meeting until I am to meet her. The hours pass slowly in my anticipation. I wonder now if it could have been a dream, such as those I concocted on my passage over here. But never in all my dreams did I create a girl such as her, sparkling and alive like no female I have ever met in life before.*

*8 November 1772*

*Joys I can scarcely contain, but little time to write: Helping with canning.*

11 November 1772

A rainy day and the canning finished finally. Though I must say that I enjoy working with the good wife; I find George a bit taciturn and stand-off. His wife is a bit more friendly, though careful not to be familiar. It makes me wonder at how I treated fellows in service to my parents, I always thought I was polite but now I wonder if they just thought me a prig.

I write prattle trying to suss how to record the wonderful afternoon in the autumn woods and the stolen hours since. I wish I could write every sentence uttered and describe every glance, but I have neither the time nor the ink. Besides, it all runs together into one golden haze of an experience.

Addy is knowledgeable and self-possessed in a way I never imagined a lady could be. Not a knowledge based in an education designed to create an interesting and appropriate mate for a man of station, but a knowledge based in practicality. In truth, I have learned more of this land in five hours spent with her than in the past two months harvesting Mr. Hart's cash crops. Her questions about life in London were penetrating and deep, ranging from architecture and history to economical practicalities. Her interest and perspective are enough to make me want to return to London to show her its beauty and see its charm through her eyes.

3 December 1772

My master and his lady hosted a post holiday feast for their kin that they called Thanksgiving. It was a wonderful time, worth all the work of harvesting and canning and preparing and scouring and cleaning and cooking. Such work I have done, my mother would be mortified knowing a son of hers had spent days stirring pots full of

potatoes for a common housewife.

The guest list, as it were, included George's brother Jason along with his family. I was curious to finally see the rest of Addy's family. She has three younger sisters, evenly spaced and the youngest is 8. They all have the light hair, as does their mother, though Addy and her brother are the only one's with their father's blue eyes. Her brother is older than her, about my own age I suppose. Jonathan has hair dark and a strong brow and chin like his father.

The rest of the guest list was comprised of George and Jason's sister, Hannah, with her husband, a fellow named Jones, and their children, little one's ranging from age 3 to 10. They also brought their home girl, an adopted lass named Margaret of 15 years old who helps with the children. I entertained Margaret over a demi-feast in the kitchen while the family ate in the dining room. I suppose I should be just as happy they did not expect us to do table service.

I have taken up smoking a pipe of late, an excuse to go out of doors in the evening as much as an enjoyment of my own labors harvesting the stuff. Sitting outside Thanksgiving night, I was surprised to be joined by Hannah. She is as dark as the Hart men, but with an air of self-possession like Addy has.

"You must be the William that Addy has spoken so much of." She said, coming up silently behind me and startling me.

"You have the advantage of me, ma'am," I replied, "I am afraid Addy has spoken very little of her family." It was a bit of a lie, she has talked quite a lot about her father and mother, and a bit about her sisters and brothers. But she had not mentioned her aunt.

She laughed. "I don't suppose she has and why would she? With the woods and fields to talk about and a fascinating and handsome young man from far away to question. Would you think



less of me if I told you that it does hurt my pride just a bit that she hasn't told you about me?"

"Not a bit of it." I replied, blushing into the night at being called handsome, as though girls back home had never said so. It was different here, and from her, somehow.

"I doubt very much she has told anyone else in the family where and with whom she has been spending her time." She told me in seriousness, "Which is why I did hope to find a moment alone with you tonight. I don't know what your intentions are with Adelle." She raised her hand to silence me as I started to protest my honorable intentions. "It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if you are stringing her on or mean to marry her, because a family friend, a young man, with power and influence in the colonies has shown an interest in having her for his wife, and that is exactly what Jason means to do. She is to make a good match. I am sorry, lad."

"But what about what she wants?" I asked.

"I don't know why she wouldn't want an easy life, but it really doesn't matter. She told me you were well-born back in the heart of the empire, you certainly have the manners to back the claim. I think you will be good for her, teach her some civil graces. Your secret and hers, it is safe with me. Just keep in mind that she has duties and you are no one here."

With that last warning, she was gone. I hadn't even time to sit back down before Addy appeared around the corner of the house motioning me over.

"Let's sneak away for a moon lit jaunt." She smiled at me.

The woods were like a cathedral, lit in blues with the moon and star light filtering down between bare branches. There hadn't been any snow yet, but the air was filled with the nip of winter coming.

*I have always spent my winters in the city, so this was a foreign land to me in more ways than the obvious.*

*Into the silence, Addy whispered, "Does this kind of thing make you miss your family"?"*

*"I think it makes me miss the idea of them, or maybe just the familiarity. But I crossed an ocean to get away from my family for a reason. What they wanted for me....." I drifted to silence, thinking about the things her family wanted for her. "Do you ever feel like you are a piece that doesn't really belong to the puzzle around you?" I asked.*

*She stopped and leaned back against a slim white birch, laughing.*

*"Have you ever tried running through the woods in a skirt?" then seriously, "All my life I have been a piece that belongs somewhere else. But everyone tries to make me belong to their puzzle."*

*She seemed far away in her thoughts and looked like an ethereal being in the pale light, one that would disappear with the breeze.*

*"Well, when my time is up and I get my land," I told her lightly, "I will buy you a pair of trousers and you can come traipse about all 25 acres whenever you like."*

*She smiled and put her hand out, taking mine and drawing me closer. Her face turned to mine and her eyes were sad and so infinitely blue.*

*"My parents are trying to marry me off to the son of some family friend. They say it is my duty and tell me what good such a powerful man will be for our family. My mother goes on and on about the different homes his family owns and the parties they throw and the people they socialize with until I think she should*

marry him herself."

I opened my mouth, but found I hadn't anything to say. Who am I to tell her to go marry the man and have an easy life? I had run away from such trappings to this rough and labor filled life. I wanted to say "don't." I wanted to say "marry me." But how could I? I had realized in my two months here that the simplicity I longed for was a life of constant labor and sometimes hardship. How could I offer this beautiful and intelligent girl that?

She watched me struggle with my own mind, then spoke again.

"When I think of the kind of life they are trying to hoist me into, it is just another puzzle I don't belong in. I don't want that kind of life. I want the woods and the fields. I want the little celebrations of births and small victories. I want...."

Her words trailed away, but her eyes spoke more than volumes. I brushed a lock of hair away from her face so I could see her eyes silvered in the moonlight, as I told her:

"I haven't got much to offer you, Addy. I have no land and only a little money, but everything I have and everything I am, I want to share with you."

"I always dreamed," she replied, her smile beckoning me, "that the man who loved me would call me Ella."

"I love you, Ella."

I will admit that I had day-dreamed while going about my labors of how soft her lips might be and how sweet the taste of her mouth, but dreams are nothing beside the memory and the memory is pale to the experience.

## Chapter 7



### Fragments

My empty glass snapped me out of the story of the journal. I had been sipping at it while reading and it was gone. I caught the bartender's eye and signaled for another. The big mirror clock in the center of the shelves caught my eye.

*12:15. The night is still so young.*

I gazed unseeing out the window, my mind stuck in the bare woods of Maryland, centuries ago. I had never seen woods that weren't mostly evergreens, the image of a birch grove caught my fancy as a creepy and somehow romantic place, even aside from the narrative.

A big piece of me wanted to stuff the journal down into the bottom of my bag and dream up a happy ending for William and Ella. Maybe he could argue the Hart family around, use his family name and his station back in England to convince them. Then he could stay on and court Ella until his three years was up and he got his land. I imagined a simple country wedding, maybe at George's farm and in a few years they would have little blond headed children to nurture and teach until eventually they would die of extreme old age in each others arms.

My finger played over the designs pressed in the leather and I knew I couldn't stop reading because I knew that wasn't how the story went. I knew that William would become Quinn, a vampire who would - some 300 years later - meet a red-headed girl in a bar in Seattle.

The bartender brought my drink over himself. His tee shirt had a cartoon graphic of the saucer on the Space Needle hovering and said "Give Me Some Space."

The memory slammed into me like a train.

*I am standing arms out to the wind on the top of the Needle, above the observation deck, on the top of the roof. The Puget Sound stretches for miles and the city of hills engulf me. I turn around and around, a ginger Julie Andrews in a strange Sound of Music, and see Quinn leaning against the huge antenna pole, watching me, smiling with a trace of pride.*

*I watch myself from within as I saunter to him.*

*"So, is this the part where you seduce me into letting you bite me?" I ask, challenging.*

*"Do you want me to?" He responds. I can feel his open empathic door, like an invitation. I wonder, the self within myself, if I feel that and understand what it is, this empathic door from my own knowledge now, or if I had felt and understood it that night. I do not know the answer.*

*I am very close to him, now. Kissing close.*

*"You'll have to catch me." I whisper. I turn and run from the center to the circumference. Without hesitation, I take a flying swan dive off the the saucer in the sky.*



*I gasp at finding myself back in a bar booth, facing a cartoon of the Needle in front of me.*

*"Are you alright?" The big lumberjack of a bartender squatted by my table. "Are you having some kind of seizure? Do you need help?"*

*"No," I focused on his face, "no. I'm fine." I was actually feeling a bit queasy. I had never really liked heights. But I gave him a bit of a smile and money for the drink.*

*The memory was unreal to me. I had been inside myself and it had seemed so natural, but now, looking at it from outside. It seemed like an action-movie trailer, not something my own real life.*

My reflection in the front window caught my eye,  
all leather straps and a white shirt like an s&m  
pirate.

*So much for real life.*

*I dived off the Space Needle.*

The girl in the window smiled back at me. I picked  
the journal back up and took a sip of the drink to  
settle my stomach.



*20 December 1772*

*I have been spending the better part of everyday threshing the  
wheat with a flail, thinking of how to reconcile my Ella's family to  
our union. It seems that every path my mind treads in this maze  
is a dead end. I don't care for keeping secrets, I never truly have,  
but for now having this small secret is a sweet thing.*

*24 December 1772*

*Ella roused me from my pipe this evening after visiting with  
her aunt and uncle, saying she had a Christmas gift for me. She  
was practically skipping as she led me to the barn and up into the  
hayloft. Lanterns were hung on the support beams and on the hay,  
was spread a bunch of blankets.*

*Ella looked at me expectantly, and laughed at my confused face  
and kissed me. I could positively drown in her kisses, but she did  
not give me that chance this time. She stepped away from me  
toward the nest she had arranged. A slight smile played on Ella's  
lips as she watched me watching her as she began to unbutton the  
little silver clasps down the front of her dress. She never glanced  
shyly away or hesitated for a moment. The dress slipped off her  
shoulders and she tugged it until it was a pool around her feet. Her*

smile never wavered as she stood there, nude, an earthly angel glowing in the lantern light. Incarnation of Venus before me, and I understood in a new way why her family wanted to marry her to wealth and power. Her beauty screams to be surrounded by marble and teak.

Something in my gaze made her suddenly blush and I beheld her innocence. She held her hand out to me. I opened my mouth to protest. To say that....

I honestly have no idea what I might have said, because she walked over and put a finger to my lips.

"Shh. This is my Christmas gift to you. I don't care anything for marriage. It is a ceremony and a contract. We don't need a contract and this is our ceremony. I believe in you. I love you. And I want to be yours."

I could not think of a single thing to say except, "I love you too, my Ella."

After, as we were preparing to reenter the world, I told her about what I had been pondering. She is adamant that her family will never accept it. I had been wondering if my family name might bring them about to the idea, but she is convinced that unless I was planning to set up as "a little lord in the new world" it would not make a bit of difference.

"I have a small amount of my own set aside from collecting herbs and roots in the woods for healing." She told me, "You said you have a bit of currency you brought over. I wonder if together we have enough to ....I don't know. Get away. Maybe we could find a place up north where we could work for land. There are always a few places where they are looking for settlers and will give you the land if you live on it for a few years."

*It sounded like a risky plan, but I had realized in my days of pondering that any plan will have risk. I told her how much I had brought and wondered aloud how far that would take us. I was shocked when she laughed out loud. She literally laid back on the blanket laughing. She dragged me down and kissed me, her laughter including the shocked look on my face.*

*"Beloved, that is a fortune."*

*"A fortune? That is pocket money. That was what I had in my billfold for being out in London. That will buy, what? A day's meal and lodging?"*

*"Do you know how much 25 acres costs in pounds?"*

*I am still, as I write this, shocked. I had thought that maybe the money would go further here, but I had no idea how much the currency could be worth in necessities. I wondered suddenly if the money would be enough for her family. If living in London society had taught me anything, it is that money will reconcile people to a lot of things. I didn't say anything to Ella, I knew she was of the opinion that her family would only be satisfied with her marrying the man they had picked out.*

*But it doesn't matter to me if we stay or we run away. Right now all that matters is that I am hers, she is mine and one way or the other we will find our dream together.*

*25 December 1772*

*Jason Hart hosted Christmas Evening at his house and I decided to stay at George's farm for a night alone. I had thought to go to the festivities, but while we were preparing the buggy, George issued me a threat..*

*"I've seen you and that fool niece of mine go of on your lonesome into the woods a few afternoons, lad. Now, I will only*



give you this warning once: If I see you so much as lift your hat to her ever again, you will find out what a horse whip feels like. Do you understand me? We have it all settled so she will have a nice comfortable life. She is well suited for it and I won't have some indentured boy under my dominion fouling that up. Do you hear?

I desperately wanted to ask him if anyone had asked Ella what she wanted. If they even cared, or if she was just another commodity to them. Another cash crop.

But I reeled myself in. This had been just the opportunity I was hoping for.

"What if the indentured boy under your dominion happened to be a man of means? What would you say if he was just under indenture to learn about the land and about living from it and in truth he had enough money to buy the farm he is indentured on and the house in the bargain? Would that make things less settled?"

He eyed me sideways while he tightened the harness around the horse.

"No, it wouldn't. Likely as not he came by it badly and caught the boat to get away with it. Even if the money was his by right and he was planning to learn a bit and turn rich farmer, the thing is settled. There are things money can't buy. Adelle is off the table. If a man were planning all those things, that man might do well to look closer at her sisters." He watched me out of the corner of his eye a moment to gauge my reaction, and returned to his point, "But regardless of all of that, you stay away from Addy. If I catch you talking to her, you'll feel this whip. If her father or brother get onto you they'll do worse. They don't really care if you can work or not, seeing as the cash crop season is over."

I held my peace on my opinion of that and decided to stay

home.

*I need to write Ella, leave a message somewhere she is sure to find it to warn her. And to set up somewhere we can post messages to each other that won't give way to suspicions. I shall have to tell her that we will have to run away.*

*I feel useless to make any sort of plan beyond leaving. In England, I would have a hundred ideas where to go and how and who would help us along the way. Here, though, I am completely ignorant. I could not even tell you the names of all the 13 colonies. I feel sure that Ella will have some ideas.*

*1 January 1773*

*The new year comes with snow. I suggested we use the old maple for our post and put a little metal box in the roots. I loved that spot even before I met Ella there and it is convenient between the two farms.*

*12 January 1773*

*I spend many of my free minutes writing now on loose sheet instead of in these bound pages, plotting and planning with my beloved. It is more difficult than I can describe to sit here when all I want to do is collect her and run into the night. More difficult still because she would go today if only I would agree. But it is simply too cold to run off into the night. We need to put as many miles as possible behind us when we go, for I am convinced that the Harts will follow us. We just cannot do that in the heart of a New England winter. But as soon as the weather turns...*

*I am determined that we should leave as clean a slate behind us as possible. I do not want to start with the tarnish of thievery on us. Ella agreed and gave me the figures for an indentured contract*

*and a horse, because we will have to take a horse from her father's stable. At fair price, it will still leave us plenty to lodge us and feed us as we make our way north.*

*Ella has decided we should go up into Pennsylvania and maybe to the new settlements in the southern tier of New York. She writes that there are maple trees and birch woods beyond count in that region. It is right on the edge of the indian territory, and apparently the native folk there have a way of tapping the trees to make a maple sugar.*

*She writes full of hopes and dreams that match my own and I dream of making them truth for her.*



The next page was blank. I turned again, the following was blank, too. I frantically flipped the heavy old pages until, maybe fifteen pages ahead was a short entry with no date.

*Truth.*

*The truth is that I thought we had become monsters, but I did not know what monstrosity is.*

*My Ella is dead. Adam is the monster who destroyed her. He took her wonderful innocence and then he took her life.*

*I will live forever if only to see him burn.*

This page was signed, the first that was: *Quinn*

The entries skipped another page and then the journaling started again, marked 1777. I scanned through them and didn't see the names Ella or Adam at

all. He was talking about New Orleans. I slammed the journal shut on the table. I couldn't believe that the story just cut off like that. I wondered why he had given me the journal at all.

I stared unseeing at the abstract design of neon signs. My fingers played with the embossed designs on the old leather and I thought of my own journal in the bottom of my bag. I had not written in it for at least a week before I Awakened. I certainly had not written in it since. What would I write? I can't even remember what happened. I could just see the entry:

*I woke up a few evenings ago and I was a vampire.*

*Lame.*

Regardless, I was just sick knowing that something horrible had happened, something that killed Ella and changed William, the hopeful lad in the New World, into Quinn, the dark and shadowy vampire. I looked around the bar and suddenly I needed to get out of here. I needed some air. I hastily packed the journal back in my bag and stumbled from my table. Everything was going fuzzy around the edges.

## Chapter 8



### Between Broken Vows

Quinn was roused from his musing on the distant image of Titian and his mental mazes by the tug of frustration from the ginger girl in the bar. He smiled slightly and was surprised by its presence on his face. He knew that she had come to the end of his tale, to the blank spaces where he could just not bring himself to put pen to paper. His mind flashed to all that came between that last hopeful entry and the first entry of his new existence. He neither stopped it, nor did he hold it; he let it wash over him and through him. When it was gone, only he remained.

He knew that he was completely invisible from across the street, but as Titian stared out the window, it seemed to Quinn that she was staring right at him. He wondered if she would keep reading, if she would tuck away the missing section and move on like a disappointing tale in a collection of short stories. When she tucked the journal away, he smiled again. She was tenacious.

He put the locket back into his pocket and pulled deeper into the shadow as she stumbled out of the booth and out onto the street like a genuine Saint Paddy's Day drunk. He had decided that he would follow her just a little bit longer before he headed back to Queen Anne. Titian looked down the street slowly left, slowly right, then fell to her hands and knees and a stream of red shot out of her mouth into the gutter.

Quinn's jaw dropped of its own volition. He looked back through the window and mentally slapped himself on the forehead.

"Drink." He whispered to himself, "I never told her."

He looked back at her as she subsided, breathing heavily for a moment, only to have another wave of nausea hit her and send her retching. His brows knit as he watched her. Without water, her body would keep trying to cleanse itself by dry-retching. When that didn't work, Titian would be overcome by the Thirst. First once, to finish cleansing her system, and again after to replace all the blood she had just lost to the gutter.

Quinn had promised himself that he would not interfere with Titian until she remembered. He had waited so long for this opportunity. But if she suffered this,

it would break her, ruin her.

With sudden decision, he spirited across the street to her side to kneel beside her. She weakly tried to push him away, mumbling that she was alright between dry heaves.

“Shhh. Shh.” He said, calming her, rubbing a hand on her back, “It’s Quinn.”

Titian turned her head to look up at him, wiping her mouth on the back of her hand. Her teeth were covered with blood and bloody mary. A little stream of red ran from her nose. Her eyes were red rimmed and tears ran down her cheeks, but she was still beautiful and fierce. She fought her own body not to keep heaving as she looked up at him, wondering if he was a hallucination.

“You can only drink water and blood. I forgot to tell you that last night, so here I am, breaking my own rule to fix what I broke. Can you stand?”

She sat slowly back on her heels, gripping his shoulder like a rock overhang. She never took her eyes off of him as he slowly stood, dragging her up with him. Quinn took her hand firmly from his shoulder and the other from her side, holding both of her hands in both of his. He could feel the beast in her just below the surface, looking for an opening, a weakness.

She rocked back and forth, the alcohol had hit her the blood in her veins in force and she was fading into it. Titian struggled and finally whispered:

“What happened to Ella?”

Quinn had never heard anyone else say his special name for his beloved. It froze him for a moment and gave the Thirst the opening it needed. Titian snapped at his neck, but their hands between their bodies was enough of an obstacle to give him a fraction of a second to shake out of his trance and dodge. He leaned backwards and brought his hands up with hers trapped between them. Using his leverage and her unsteadiness, he whirled her around, bringing his arms down over hers. She was trapped, facing away from him.

He squeezed her tight and let the night sky take him.

Quinn didn’t know Northgate very well, in fact tonight was the first time he had been this far north of the city. He couldn’t carry her very long, particularly if she started fighting him, so he headed south searching the ground beneath them for a fountain or a pool. Searching for water.



I fought myself not to fight Quinn as he held me tight in his arms far above the ground. The Thirst was as bad as it had been the night I Awoke, but I had fought it off then and I would do it now. I delved within my body, feeling the way my lungs strained against his arms as I took a deep breath. Focused on the smell of the air, moist this high, but was distracted as my stomach contracted violently again.

My own body was fighting me.

I looked up at the stars and wished I hadn't used my first star wish so early. A bright star twinkled at me, winked at me, and the memory washed over me:

*"I want to fly!" I say to Quinn, as we walk down one of the thin roads near Pioneer Square in the historic district. Quinn smiles back at me, shaking his head.*

*"Five hours ago you didn't believe in flying without a machine, three hours ago you could barely move, and now you want to fly?"*

*I nod and I can feel an excited little-girl-at-Christmas look on my face. "Teach me now. You said that tomorrow I won't remember anything right?"*

*He nods, closed and giving me nothing.*

*"But it will come back, one chunk at a time, right?"*

*He nods again. Still closed, but I can see a hint of a smile on his face.*

*"So, someday in a day or a week or a month, I will suddenly get this flash and know how to fly. I will soar off into the clouds and leave Seattle behind me for a while. I will see the world!" I fling my arms out and twirl around again and again, just as I had on the Space Needle. When I stop I am facing Quinn and he is not closed anymore. I can feel all the mixed emotions radiating from him. He sees me as cute, maybe even adorable, and undeniably innocent which makes him*

a little sad, in a small corner of his soul. There is a joy in him but also a caution, like he doesn't want to get swept away by me and thinks that he might.

"I did not even know that flying was possible for nearly a hundred years." He tells me, "It was another fifty before I figured out the trick. And here you want me to just skip over all that and teach you on your first night?"

I nod emphatically grinning.

"Well, alright then." He says, suppressing a grin of his own. "The trick is that you are not flying. Stop thinking of it as flying. What you are really doing is going so fast that you don't have to move."

I have no idea what he means.

He walks close to me, looking down into my eyes and running a finger down the side of my face.

"I never said it was easy." He speaks so quietly.

"So, how do I start?" I ask him, focusing on the task and not letting myself get distracted by this beautiful, shadowy man. He kisses my forehead and takes my hand, leading me the few steps to the main cross street. It is a wide boulevard, flanked on either side with thin, tall turn-of-the-century buildings. It is still and silent in the early, early morning. Quinn positions me facing north, down the road and circles behind me.

"You start by running." He murmurs in my ear, "Run as fast as you can, run faster than you can. Release yourself to it. When you are going fast beyond your own belief, think of going faster. Imagine going so fast that your feet leave the ground, and you don't need to pump your legs anymore because there is nothing for them to traction against. That" Quinn barely whispers in my ear, "is flying."

I do not hesitate, I run. My legs are moving in time with my pumping arms and my heart speeds up and my breathing is labored, but I think of going faster



still. I imagine of my feet not touching the ground any more and I leap. Just like that I am rolling and scraping on the ground until I come to a full and complete stop.

My hoodie and jeans are decent all-purpose armor, but my hands are pretty scraped up. I am sitting on the ground and I watch my wounds close, even the now-self inside myself is still astounded by the healing.

"Can a human heal like that?" Quinn asks in a leading way, going to one knee beside me and taking up one of my hands to lick clean of blood.

"No." I answer.

"No. A human can't move the way that we do either, but you are still using your human skills. You are conditioned to the idea that you have to use your muscles, that you have to breath in more oxygen, and your heart has to pump harder to get that oxygen to those muscles." He stands, pulling me with him. I watch him as I clean the blood from my other hand with my tongue, revealing in the taste of it.

Quinn turns me back facing south, standing behind me again. Again he whispers in my ear:

"Release yourself to it."

I start running, as I had before. After a few steps, I realize that my breathing is speeding, my heart is pumping. I stop focusing on my functions. I focus my mind instead on the scenery going by me like a fast forward movie reel, and it does. I put my arms out, feeling the wind whip my hoodie, and feeling that I don't need my arms to pump to go this fast. Faster. Faster. I imagine the world going by in blur, the street moving away from me. I imagine running so fast I was running on air, and I am. I am suddenly "running" by second story windows and climbing higher, like there is an invisible hill beneath my feet. I stop looking around, a little afraid that it will slow me and I would fall. Instead I look out at the stars.

*"Second star to the right..." I say out loud to myself, imagining the speed it would take to get to one of those stars and I stop running and just fly.*



Quinn saw what he was looking for just ahead. It was a large body of water. Larger than he needed, honestly, but he had realized quickly that being interrupted by some homeowner whose pool they had crashed or some apartment complex security would end badly. Luckily, Titian had stopped fighting him. She laid limp in his arms.

Quinn repositioned his left arm to hold her, freeing his right arm to remove the bag strapped cross-ways on her torso. He put it over his own head, strap across his chest, as they came right above the lake. He flew over the water, going lower and lower as they neared the grassy park on the south side and let Titian drop into the murk ten feet from the shore. He never slowed, but simply stopped where water met land. His speed was so great that he turned back to face her from the shore before she hit the water.

She sputtered curse words as she hit and the cold water enveloped her. It filled her pores and her mouth opened to it of its own volition. It was shallow enough here that her converse sneakers touched bottom with room to spare. She could have stood and the water would have been at chest level, but Titian's instinct was to stay in the water, so she kicked herself along off the bottom, keeping only her nose and head out of the water. A spasm hit her as her body used the water to complete the cleansing process from those damned bloody mary drinks.

*I didn't even enjoy them,* Titian thought as the wave sent her puking back into the water.

She moved further towards the shore and drank more, then lay on her back, floating in the lake like Guinevere, waiting for more nausea to hit her. Again and again she repeated the process for what felt like forever until, finally, she drifted on her back as minutes went ticking by and she felt nothing. Her body was done with its rebellion. The war was over.

The Thirst came on the heels of that thought, like a knock on the door. It

threw visions of last night with the girl, Janie, and earlier this evening with Erin up behind her closed eyelids. Titian took a deep breath and turned in the water, diving below the surface and covering the distance to the shore.

Quinn watched without movement as she crawled out of the water, squatting in a ball just at the edge of dry land. She flung wet hair in a water-shooting arc as her head came up sharply. Green eyes focused on him. He felt nothing from her, she was as closed and implacable as a wild tiger. He watched as she stood. Her leather outfit was gleaming wet, but unchanged, while the white shirt was soaked and stuck to her like a second skin, revealing the slim waist tapering out into slim hips that her uniform of jeans and hooded sweatshirts had hidden. Her hair was glued with wet to her head and neck and chest, giving a glimpse of how striking her face was without the fiery mane to distract from it.

She walked slowly toward him, hunting him. He had resigned himself to the fact that she would have to feed from him: She would need blood tonight and immediately, and he did not have any other candidates hanging around. But this....this was not good. He sighed. He had imagined this first time after her Awakening so much differently. But what in his life hadn't he imagined differently? He pushed his resignation aside as she came within arms reach.

"Titian, do you want to know what happened to my Ella?" Quinn asked.

She stopped directly in front of him. His words had given Titian something to latch onto. From deep within herself, below the Thirst, she grabbed onto it like a lifeline and used it to draw herself back to the surface. The Thirst fought her, she would only have a moment before it would overcome her. She opened herself completely and whispered, "Yes."

Quinn opened that single part of himself and opened his arms to the wet, cold vampire in front of him, tipping his head to one side, revealing his neck in invitation. Titian stepped into his arms, wrapping her own arms around his waist under his long coat and going on tiptoe to reach his neck. She fought the Thirst, which was giving her visions of tearing and ripping flesh and she gently sunk her fangs in.

## Chapter 9



### Blood Memories

The memories were carried with the blood, a blinding procession of fast-forward flashes that interspersed with short segments at normal speed. I could neither control or block any of it, I could only accept it.

\*

*I am strapped to a tree, a older man and a younger man punch me gut and ribs ruthlessly, while another older man stands a distance away coiling a long whip.*

\*

*Being carried by a ghost, a phantom of white with blond hair, through the dark woods.*

\*

*Spoon fed broth. Eyes won't open and every breath hurts. Images of Ella being chased, a man silhouetted by sunlight, and of my own self - Titian - flit behind my eyelids.*

\*

*Sitting up in a rough-made bed, light from a fireplace dancing around an abandoned-looking house. The ghost that carried me here is in the shadows, but I know it is Ella. I just know.*

*"Something happened, but I can't remember. William, I can't remember. I just woke up here one evening and I was like this." She steps out of the shadow and she is*

white, her teeth delicate points changing the look of her mouth, and tears are running down her face.

I reach an arm out to her, bringing her beside the bed. "I do not care, Ella. Please, do not cry. There is no need; I want you, not some dream of who you are, you. I love you! I promised we would make this work, together. I will not abandon you now. Not ever."

★

I was kissing her, gently, for my sake. My body was still weak and oh-so-very sore from the beating. She kisses her way down my neck, and I moan, deep in my throat. She pulls away suddenly, and is on the other side of the room.

"Ella, what? What is the matter?" I ask.

"The blood. I can smell your blood. And there is this thing inside me, this Thirst." Her chest is heaving and she slips down the wall becoming a ball in the corner. "It wants me to do...such horrible things."

"You need blood? You desire it?" I ask, strangely not horrified.

"I have been drinking from animals I catch in the woods. But every night it gets worse. Every night I want you more in that way. When you were unconscious...I...I licked the blood from your wounds." She looks down, embarrassed.

"I would not deny you in any way you want me," I reply coyly and unafraid, holding my arms out to draw her back to me. "Doctors bleed their patients, it would be good for me." I pick up the small pocket knife that sits in the pile of things out of my clothing as she comes slowly closer. I make an incision on the muscle in the back of my forearm, deep enough to bleed when I flex.

She is suddenly at my side, her tongue sending painful pleasant jolts up my arm.

★

*Ella is beside me when I wake, eyes wet, but she is composed.*

*"I remember," she says, "I remember everything." Her face gets hard, then looks like it will break. Then she sighs, composing herself and looking at me deeply, with all her soul. "But that doesn't matter. What matters is that I remember how it was done. How I was made this way and I can do it to you, if you want. It will make all these wounds go away, and we can run, but you and I will never see the sun."*

*"But I will be with you," I reply, "Who needs the sun when there is beauty like you around?"*

☾★

The wound on Quinn's neck closed, cutting off the memories with the blood. I opened my mouth to bite him again, but he pushed me away, turning his back to me.

I realized that the Thirst was gone again and the nausea.

*Right. So, only water and blood in the future then.*

That settled, I thought about what I had just experienced and realized that I had experienced those things. Just as in my own flashes of memory from the lost night, I had been seeing in the first person. I had been seeing all of that from within Quinn.

Suddenly, I wanted to go over and hug him, give him some comfort. I still did not know what had happened to Ella, but now I knew better than any journal could convey just how deeply and truly he had loved her.

He turned back around to me and put a warm hand to my cold, wet face. I could feel a sad gratitude from him, for my desire to help him in some way. I leaned my

face into his hand, sure that - now that the crisis was over - he would leave again.

"Not tonight," he answered my thought, "The Thirst seems gone, but before morning it will come back just as strong." He took off his coat and placed it on my shoulders. "I have a place we can go for the night and where you can spend the day safely."

He took me in his arms again and took to the sky. I had needed a bit of a run to take off, in my memory, but Quinn just ascended. The wind whipped at the coat he had lent me and at the wet fabric still clinging to my torso and legs as we flew south over Lake Union and Capitol Hill. He descended like lightning toward the ground and, instantly, we were just standing there on a street as though the flying had never happened. We were at Pioneer Square.

Quinn kept my hand and lead me into one of the bars lining the square. The place was deserted except for the lone bartender cleaning the last of the night's glasses. He looked up, starting to say that they were closed, but stopped when he saw Quinn. He nodded to the vampire and went back to his work. Without a word, Quinn led me through to the back room and pulled up a trap door in the floor.

*What is with vampires and trap doors in the floor?*

The space below was lit and I could see bottles lining the walls on shelves before Quinn blocked my view, going down the steep wooden stairs. I followed him quickly, closing the trap door behind me.

The room was exactly as I expected: A drink cellar for a bar. There were racks lining all four walls with bottles of all variety. Some looked like they might have been put down there today, and others had dust that said they had been there for ages. Under the stairs and spilling out around were aluminum kegs labeled with bright stickers on the side with brewery information.

I opened my mouth to ask Quinn if this would really be safe during the day, but closed it again. He had swung out one of the racks across from the stairs revealing a hole which led out into a bigger space, dimly lit. He smiled at me, an eyebrow raised, and gestured me inside.

The room looked like an old boudoir. The opulent wallpaper was water stained and peeling in places, but the velvet on the chaise lounge and two matching chairs looked untouched and inviting in the soft glow from a single colored glass lamp on the vanity. Quinn went right in and started turning on the other lamps, until the room was lit with mingling reds and blues and yellows. Across from the wine cellar door, where I stood, was another door decorated in art deco carvings. To the left was a recessed area with a bed tucked into it, fabrics flowing from a single point centered above the bed, like something out of Inara's shuttle.

"Come in," Quinn said, lighting the candles on the coffee table in the center of the room. "Close the door."

I did as he instructed and stood just inside the door. My clothes were still wet and I didn't want to ruin the furniture.

"At the turn of the century," Quinn spoke, "this bar was owned by a woman. Rare in those days, even out here in the west. She turned this old storage room into her personal boudoir for entertaining the rich and powerful and beautiful and intriguing." He went over to a set of double doors built into the walls and opened it to reveal a fully stocked wardrobe.

"So were you rich, powerful, beautiful, or intriguing?" I asked him.

He laughed as he pulled out a few different garments to examine. "Very good." He nodded, "I would like to say all of the above, but I do not know what she saw in me."



He tossed something over a standing screen in the near corner. "Would you like to change into something dry?" He asked.

"Yes!" I replied emphatically, then I remembered what I was wearing, "But, I don't know how to get this off." I finished, embarrassed. I pulled off his coat and handed it back to him. He threw it carelessly on the closest chair.

Quinn walked slowly around me, studying the garment as he moved. He stopped behind me and reached around to unhook two of the straps under the bust section. He unhooked something on the side and two more of the straps fell swinging. He unhooked one more thing in the center of the back and the entire leather piece holding my breasts loosened. The wet fabric underneath was suddenly very wet and cold on my skin and parts of me felt like they could breathe finally. I hadn't really realized that I had felt constricted until released from my leather bondage.

"This is not a piece you can take off or put on by yourself." Quinn said neutrally. Through his slightly ajar empathic door, I could feel a mix of amusement, desire, and reserve. One more clasp and the whole leather contraption fell off of me onto the thick crimson carpet on the floor. I realized something.

"This is a new carpet." I said, staring at it. I turned to him. "The wallpaper is water stained. You put in this carpet."

He just smiled.

I walked past him into the screened area. There was a nook here too with a table holding a lamp and an oval standing mirror. I turned the light on with one hand and started unbuttoning the shirt with the other. The light bathed me in pink and yellow diamonds. It was the first time I had seen myself in a mirror that day and I was surprised again by myself. With Quinn's blood running through my veins and the pink and yellow

squares from the lamp on my skin, I looked almost....  
*Almost human.*

I peeled the shirt off, feeling the moisture cold on my skin. The leggings felt like a snake skin being shed. My body was criss-crossed with red lines.

*S'pose that's what you get when you live in leather.*

I watched the vampire in the mirror as she wound the damp hair on top of her head. There were bobby pins on the table next to the lamp, big old fashioned ones. They held my hair safely away from the fine fabric I was donning.

The black garment Quinn had put out for me was a silk gown. If fabric were food, this felt like gourmet chocolate. It fit as though it had been tailored for me. It seemed expensive, the way it perfectly fit the swells of my figure and hung gracefully in the curves, accentuating them without being the form-fit of the stretch fabrics I was used to.

There was a clothes butler between the wall and the screen. I put the wet clothes over it to dry before I stepped out from behind the screen. Quinn stood from the chair and took my hand, leading me as in a dance to the center of the room.

"I have met princesses of empires that were not as lovely as you." He said and kissed my hand. Actually kissed my hand, his eyes watching mine.

"I have a feeling that this is not the first time you've said that." I replied.

Quinn raised an eyebrow. "It is not the first time it has been true."

I let myself sink into the chaise lounge. "Was it true of the woman who made this boudoir?"

"It was the similarity in your figure to hers that brought this place to mind in the first place."

"What was she like?" I asked, looking around at the paintings on the walls, the unique flavor of the room.

He sat down in one of the chairs, one leg over the padded arm of the chair and let his head fall back. His smooth face looked almost boyish as he smiled with the recollections.

"She was built as you are, as I said, but she had curly black hair. She claimed she was descended from a Spanish missionary who fell in love with a native girl and defected from the church. I am not sure if I believe that, but I never cared if her stories were true or not. She could spin tales all night like Shahrazad."

I smiled at his description. The personality sounded a little like Erin. "I met a girl who is the same way. Any story worth telling is worth making a right tale of to this lass." Thinking of Erin brought Vex to mind.

"I met another person, last night. One you should remember." I told him, "His name is Vex."

His emotions rolled off of him, a whirl of all different feelings mixing and separating like detritus in a tornado. His eyebrows bunched then released, he smiled, then frowned shaking his head, and gave a short laugh, bringing his fist to his mouth. "Vex." He said quietly to his hand. He rubbed his hand down his jaw and looked at me intensely. "How is he?"

"Looking for you." I answered. He nodded, slowly.

"Good." He said. "That is good."

"Why is it good?" I asked him. Quinn studied me seriously for a moment.

"How much of his story do you know?"

"I know his version of his night of Awakening."

"He still doesn't remember all of it, does he?"

"No."

"But now, he isn't running from it. He is seeking it." He explained. "I was a pressure point, like a little rock that is the key piece holding back a dam. How is he, truly?"

I understood the question. In Vex's recollection of his time with Quinn, he had sounded introverted, cut off.

"I think he is better than when you knew him. He is part of a little group, and they....well, I don't think you really can stay too introverted around them." I laughed.

I suddenly saw myself from an outside perspective and wasn't really sure who I was or how I had gotten here. These surroundings, this gown, lounging on a chaise in a boudoir, laughing with a three-hundred year old gentleman vampire. It just all seemed suddenly surreal. Seventy-two hours ago I had been a regular person: getting up, going to class, hanging out.

A memory came to me. This memory did not strike me violent and demanding as the others had, but floated to the surface gently:

*We are sitting at a table in the bar, facing each other across it's small round top. I have the feeling that we are in the midst of a long conversation.*

*I lean back, eyeing Quinn skeptically. "Why would you be interested in my life?" I ask, "You have lived for hundreds of years. You must have met some of the most fascinating people. Writers, artists, philosophers, the rich and powerful and talented. I just wake up, I go about my day, I do my thing, and I go to sleep."*

*"That is the thing that it is hard to understand in living one short human life and looking back on the 'great' people of history," he responds, leaning forward on the table and speaking in a low, deep voice, "Every single one of them woke up, went about their day, did their own thing, and wondered why anyone would be interested in their life."*

The memory slipped back down, into the pool of remembered and still-hidden memories from that night. It left me feeling a little lost, a little small in a

big world that I clearly didn't know the half of.

"Why did you give me that envelope of stuff?" I asked him. "Why me? I know that you didn't wait for me to come along. You have made other people into vampires in your nights. So why did you give me that journal instead of one of them? Instead of Vex?"

He shifted in the chair, sitting up and leaning forward on his knees. Red buttons glinted with the movement. They looked like drops of blood down his front. "You are asking me questions that I cannot give you answers for right now." He stood up, frustrated, and walked over to sit beside me on the lounge. I tucked my legs under me and sat up, not touching him.

"I did wait for you to come along. I have waited a long time. I promise you," He took my hand in his, "promise you that you will know why, in time. It is in you, the answer to that, you just do not know it, yet."

"You are going to leave before morning, aren't you? You are going to disappear again." I said, stating fact.

"I am." He answered, directly, turning his lowered head to look at me. "I must. This was....an unexpected pleasure, playing the gentleman to your damsel in distress," he reached over to push an escaped lock of my hair from my face, behind my ear, "but it does not change any of the things that were true that first night. I do not want you sucked into the whirlpool of my existence until you understand and can make the choice."

I longed for him from a foot away. I did not want him to leave me alone again. It wasn't that I was afraid, that I didn't think I could fend for myself. No. It was that he made the world flow at a different speed. I burned through time and task like a fire consuming, but when I was with Quinn, the world seemed to slow and flow like a raft down a river.

I tucked my legs further under me to kneel so I

could reach behind him. I tugged at the tail on the ribbon that held his hair back and it fell loose. His black hair was waves around his white face. From this close, I could see that his eyes weren't black, but a deep brown with gold flecks embedded. He studied me as I learned his face.

"When I look at you like this," I whispered, "I think I see William peeking through." His eyes were surprised. I felt it mixing with desire and blending, like colors on a palette. I slid my hand through his hair, feeling the powdery soft texture of his skin juxtaposed with how strong his features were.

I felt the Thirst stir as I let my door open wide, releasing my desire and emotion to mix with the tendrils emanating from him. It mixed with a sadness, a sadness I understood in a way. Reading the journal, I had envisioned the tale from his point of view, as if I were he. Enhancing that perspective, the flashes of memory he had given me when I had fed on him earlier were in my mind as my own, so similar to the flashes from my Lost Night. I had seen Ella through Quinn's eyes. In a way, I loved her myself. Through this shared love of her, I loved him, too.

I let my lips sink onto his, slowly. Quinn parted his lips slightly and my tongue flicked, tasting him. His hand on my neck, nails digging into my flesh near my spine. The pain was immediate and real, it sent electric charges down my spine. The Thirst rolled in the sensations feeding from the passion and the promise of blood that it implied.

Quinn moved his hands down to my shoulder and gently pushed me back away from him. He was breathing in deep swells and his eyes seemed darker than before, the flecks in them sparkling brighter.

"Not yet." He said, and I could feel the regret biting him, begging him to change his mind, whispering that it would be okay. He repeated, "Not yet. You can

not be bonded to me yet. Not like this. Not yet." He gave in for a single second, to take my face in his hands and kiss me for just a micro-moment. He took a breath, bringing himself back to control. He turned his dark eyes back to mine, still so close.

"I felt your Thirst stirring in all that desire." He pushed the hair with one hand back over his shoulder, exposing his neck. "If you find common ground with it and find it early and ride that common ground where it leads, it is not the beast it might be. You can't fight it and win, Titian."

"I have been so lucky." I told him with candor, "So lucky. I know it."

"No," he told me, "it isn't luck. You have used your strength to fight submitting until you are right on the line and then you find a path you can walk on that line. Not submitting, but so close. The choices are not fight or submit with the Thirst, there is another way."

"I think I found it on the bridge with Janie. The first night." I told him, I suddenly wondered, "Were you watching, then? You must have been watching me to be johnny-on-the-spot tonight."

Quinn smiled up at me, impressed. "I saw. You two were like an empathic supernova, I would have felt it from here, but I saw."

I felt the Thirst roll again, it was like standing in a rising tide. I did not want to fight it again, even for a little while. I didn't need to.

"Quinn," I said seriously, "you gave me the journal. I want to know what happened to Ella. But it doesn't have to be like this. It doesn't have to be now."

"My Titian." He kissed my forehead, "I have lived with what happened then every single night for two-hundred and forty years. It never stops being exactly what it is. If you want that from me, it is yours to

take."

I stood up on my knees and swung myself over to sit straddling him. He was amused and neutral, allowing only the slightest desire to escape his core. His hands rested above the gentle swell of my hips, caressing the soft fabric gliding over my skin. I tangled his hair in my hand, pulling his head gently to the side, stretching his neck to see the pulse below the skin, to smell the blood just below the surface.

*In this way, we both give in to our passions. Our desire for each other, and in a strange way, our passion for Ella. In this way, I can find common ground.*

I struck at him. I was not gentle, I was fierce with my own passion and desire, with my frustration and longing and with the Thirst riding it all like a wave. Quinn wrapped his arms around my torso rocking me with him as he, too, rode my wave while my sharp vampire teeth penetrated him. I held them in him, feeling it all build higher and higher.

When I pulled my teeth out, the blood squirted with the built pressure, driving back into my throat. I pushed Ella to the front of my mind as I latched onto Quinn's neck, my arms holding him prone, holding him in my power. I demanded the memories and they came.

*I am awake and there is no pain and Ella is beside me on the bed. She is stroking my face gently, watching me. She looks confused to see me staring back at her.*

*"You are awake. When I...when it happened to me, I was out after that first rush. I had just time enough to run here, then I was gone until the next evening." She smiled down at me, "How do you feel?"*

*I stretch, like after a nap. It just feels wonderful to feel wonderful, to feel my muscles moving without hurting. "Incredible." I reply.*

*"Pretty soon you will feel the Thirst and we will*



have to teach you to catch wild things in the woods."

"How do you feel?" I ask, suddenly curious about something.

"I have not felt so good since before all of this. I don't think I even realized how bad that damnable Thirst was, until now. It almost like it is gone."

"I think, maybe, animals are not enough for us like this." I tell her, hesitantly.

"Like rabbit starvation. You can't eat just rabbits, you will die." I nod, even though I had never heard of rabbit starvation.

"You won't remember this tomorrow." Ella informs me. "It will be this great blank in your life. But I will be here." She smiles at me, with a touch of sadness in it that makes her look older, more mature. I realize that the sadness has been in her all night, I just did not recognize it.

"What do you remember, from that night?" I ask in full candor.

"He....he," she stammers then looks away from me. "His name is Adam. He took me from the street. I was there, then there was this blur and suddenly I was somewhere else. He...he..." She stops again, unable to say the words.

I know what he did. I can feel it from her, like a memory you could breath in. He had violated her. For blood or for sex or for both, he had stolen her and he had stolen from her. She is afraid. My heart is suddenly still and cold with the horror of it, the horror of her innocence stripped from her in such a brutal way.

"Shhh," I comfort, drawing her to me, she buries her head in my chest and cries. I suddenly wonder why he had not just let her die? Why did he change her?

She raises her head to look at me, her own eyes as cold as the winter air and she answers me as though she heard the thought, "He said he was going to take me

*back to his society. He said that he would break me and that it would be fun."*

*\**

*We are near the big maple tree by the creek. The moon is a sliver, a boat riding in the sky to the east.*

*"I will get my journal and your letters." I say, by way of a pep talk, "You get my letters."*

*"And my locket." She adds.*

*"And your locket. We will meet back here and fly through the woods as fast as we can go north until the dawn catches up with us."*

*"Free." She says, taking my hands in hers.*

*"Free." I agree, and kiss her.*

*\**

*She is screaming. I can hear her from outside George's farm. I stuff the journal inside my coat and the letters in my back pocket and run.*

*☾*

*The wound was closed.*

*I licked at his neck, tasting the salty copper blood taste of his skin. The Thirst was gone, but my desire wasn't. I could see the tall, mansard-roofed house across the fields and I could hear Ella screaming.*

*For the second*

*Or is it the third?*

*time that night, Quinn pushed me away from him.*

*"No." I said, "No, you can't leave me here tonight without knowing. In my head she is screaming, and it won't stop until I know."*

*"She'll keep screaming after you know," he*

promised, "she doesn't stop. But I only have so much blood to give, my Titian, even to you."

"Tell me then." I demanded.

"No." He refused flatly. "But you will know. I promise. Next time we meet, you will know. Now, it is almost dawn." Quinn stood, and walked over to the chair to take his coat.

"You know this place now and you can use it, but not every night. Don't stay anywhere every night."

"Are you going to disappear again?" I asked him, laying back on the lounge.

"I thought I would use your front door." He replied, indicating the door opposite the one we had come in. "Lock them both." He advised me.

Quinn opened the door to darkness. He was suddenly above me, his hand behind my head, pulling me up to kiss him. I abandoned myself to the kiss. He broke the moment and put a finger in his mouth, biting it, piercing it.

"A gift," he whispered, looking in my eyes, "so she doesn't scream in your dreams."

He placed the finger gently on my lips, dragging blood onto them. My tongue flicked out to taste. Quinn was gone with a bang as the door shut behind him. I licked my lips and the memory flowed up:

*I am Awake, in the same boudoir, in the same chaise lounge. Memory within memory flashes back to Quinn, above me, fuzzy and faded around the edges, hazy.*

*I sit up on my elbow and look down at my hands. The skin is white and powdery, the wrinkles on the palm of my hand look simultaneously familiar and alien. I explore my canine teeth with my tongue, they are so much longer and I cut my tongue on the sharp point.*

*"There is a mirror over there." Quinn is sitting in the dim light, still, neutral, staring into the corner of the room. I am fascinated by the antique brass buttons on his military style jacket for a moment, then*

I follow his gaze. The screen is folded up and leaning against the wall, so the mirror reflects my image back at me, a white face peeking above the crimson velvet of the back of the chaise.

I get up slowly, watching myself in the mirror. Looking at my face, new. I watch myself make faces. I look at my new teeth. I move the skin on my face with my hands, seeing and feeling the texture.

"Tomorrow, this moment will be gone from your mind. You will discover all this anew." Quinn says quietly behind me. I pull off my t-shirt to see my new torso, uninhibited by Quinn. I wonder, how could I be inhibited by him now? I smile and it looks different to my eyes, with the teeth.

"Then someday," Quinn continues, "you will remember this moment but it will be as a piece in a jumbled puzzle, without context."

I turn around, Quinn is neither staring at my nakedness nor looking away. He is neutral.

"Will I remember you tomorrow?" I ask walking toward him, pulling the t-shirt back on. He smiles slightly.

"Perhaps as a flash of a face, to begin with. I will be like a stranger across a bar to you tomorrow."

"I will never know you again the way I do right now." It is a statement of fact.

"No, you won't. The Lost Night will fragment your concept of linear reality. It is like stepping outside of time. Part of the gift of the blood."

I am standing before him now and he takes my hands in his, pulling me down to kneel next to him. He pets my hair and I lean my head against his leg.

"Most people, when they change, do not have this time." He says.

I look up at him, questioningly.

"They have the time right after the change and then they sleep the rest of the night and day and awake

lost. Only the very strong have this time."

"You keep saying that I am strong, but I don't know what you mean. I still don't understand."

"I don't know if it can be quantified." He sighs. "Look at that painting up there." He points to an oil piece on the wall above the chaise. It is an expressionist style painting of a red haired woman reclining, Venus on a chaise lounge.

"That was done by an Australian named Ambrose Patterson during the Prohibition right in this room. He called it Titian after a renaissance artist who painted the red-haired courtesans of Venice. What do you see when you look at her?"

She is looking directly out from her portrait, capturing you with her eyes. There is no defiance in her, there is a smidge of pride, and a comfortableness.

"Strength." I answer.

## Chapter 10



### Dawn

I jolted out of the memory to find myself here and now and in the chaise lounge. Quinn was gone. I stood and turned around. I looked at the painting on the wall. I hadn't even noticed it when we came in, but now I studied it. The light was still on next to the mirror when I went behind the screen to study myself. I wasn't looking at individual parts, not checking to make sure my hair looked acceptable or my clothes bunched. I looked at the whole. I looked into my own eyes and I saw the similarity to the painting, but I knew what was inside my own head and it did not feel strong.

I felt lost. Like there was something I was supposed to do, something planned that is just on the tip of my tongue, but I could not remember. The pieces of memory were, in their own way, more confusing than not knowing anything would have been. I felt like I was on a treasure hunt, following first one clue and then another to find the prize.

*What is the prize?*

I already had the prize. I had wanted something more. To walk my own path and now I could. I was outside of time, as Quinn had phrased it. Before, through all my life, I had always known what was next. I was always planning three steps ahead. Good grades in high school, clubs and community service for applying to colleges. Sports and extra projects, parties and conferences in college to round myself out and to socialize and network for after college. Finding the right internships. Looking at jobs and graduate schools. I had walked the path that was set for me in the bright sunshine, looking with binoculars

at the path ahead. Now I was walking in the dark, with no idea what was ahead. All I could do was keep going forward, one step at a time in my little circle of candle light.

I turned the lamp off and became a ghost in the darkness reflected. When both doors were locked and the lamps extinguished, leaving only the candles on the coffee table burning, I climbed onto the plush and tented bed. I could feel the sunrise getting close and basked in it until I was burning in the brightness.

# Day 3



“Those who wish to take the world and control it  
I see that they cannot succeed  
The world is a sacred instrument  
One cannot control it  
The one who controls it will fail  
The one who grasps it will lose  
  
Because all things:  
Either lead or follow  
Either blow hot or cold  
Either have strength or weakness  
Either have ownership or take by force.”

*– Lao Tzu, Tao te Ching*

## Chapter 1



### **Awake Underground**

Awake.

*Where am I?*

Soft velvety smoothness surrounds me.

*Velvet and satin and silks.*

*Thirsty.*

It was like a reminder, like an alarm.

*I feel like I belong to this place.*

I slipped off the end of the bed and moved silently



on the carpet, striking a match and adjusting the wicks on the old lamp lights. I folded up the heavy lacquered screen effortlessly, exposing the mirror to the room as it had been that lost night. As I had remembered.

*I wonder when he moved it.*

In the mirror, my usually straight hair fell in waves, attesting to the cool moisture in the air in this place and the dress fell as graceful as it had the night before, attesting to its quality. What I saw was a beautiful study in black and white and red in the mirror. It seemed like a framed portrait of someone else in some other time.

There were voices on the other side of the door that Quinn had left through last night, the one that did not go into the wine cellar. Sneaking silently on the carpet, I pressed myself against the angular carvings on the door and listened as the voices got closer and closer and right outside the door and faded away and were gone.

"...during the gold rush. During that time nearly 10% of Seattle's women claimed to be 'seamstresses.' We aren't saying they weren't, but half of them lived in a three block radius around the underground, so...."

I unlocked the door and opened it slowly. The brick hallway it entered onto was lit by bare bulbs in the ceiling. To the right, a brick arch held an old iron gate, to the left, a rough made opening in a brick wall led to wooden stairs and wound out of sight.

*The Seattle Underground. Huh.*

I locked the door again and collapsed onto the comfortable chaise lounge. The Thirst struck at me, unexpected, and the memory rolled on it's heels, transporting me:

*I am sitting on the chaise in the underground room.  
I am human.*

*"I must tell you a thing." Quinn sits on the end of*

the chaise lounge, his dark eyes unwavering on me. "The poem you saw me reading tonight was not the first I have seen."

I sit up, my eyes are wide, my mouth agape.

"I discovered the first at this little music bar in Fremont. Margaux LaSorde was playing. Since then, I have been following your words like breadcrumbs through the urban jungle." He brings his hand up to my cheek, his fingers caressing my neck and drawing me closer.

"Tonight I have seen for the first time the face that goes with that soul and I find them both strange and beautiful."

The kiss is gentle and warm like sinking into honey. As it heats up, his hand traces like feathers down my arm to settle at my waist. The slightest sliver of his hand touches my skin where the sweatshirt is parted from the jeans.

I pull away from him to pull the sweatshirt over my head and throw my leg over one of his, so I am kneeling, straddling his one leg. His hand is warm and soft and big on my waist under my t-shirt. He does not caress my skin or move his hand, but lets it sit there and I think I can feel his pulse in my skin. He never takes his eyes from mine.

I kiss him again and we connect dynamically. All stillness is gone as his hand moves under my shirt up my back and spine, and I feel his movement in the muscles of his shoulders and my hips move with it. Moving lips, moving hands, moving bodies, the dance.

In the midst of this passion a decision suddenly emerges. I break the kiss and the dance and stare down at Quinn and he stares back at me, chest heaving his breath.

"I want you to set me free. Will you?"

"Everything will change. You will change." He replies, neutral, unreadable.

"Yes." I reply simply.

## Chapter 2



### Napkins

Sudden as it had come, the memory was gone and I was back on the chaise alone.

*Thirsty.*

And I was Thirsty.

My satchel, spilled open since last night on a chair opposite caught my eye. It attested to me how comfortable and safe I felt here, that I would let the journals and the napkin and the Remember envelope, not to mention the money, just fall out of my bag. I wondered, spying that envelope, if I had remembered yet. If I knew enough to open it. Somehow, I didn't think so. The puzzle pieces weren't connected yet. The twine tied box fell from the bag, unloosened by some tiny vibration finally to fall bouncing down the money to land near the chaise.

It felt light in my hands, like a box of air, of cotton candy. I spun it around my fingers. It was a fairly long and wide box, but thin. Almost the size of the journal.

*I wonder if it could be....*

I ripped the twine from the box and gently lifted the lid off. There was a napkin on top, scribbled on with a pen and dated April 16.

*April 16*

*These worlds do not speak of wisdom*

*These words of longing cry:*

*Stillness- - - - - .*

*Touch taste see time rush by.*

*Bustling rustling flight*

*stopped in screams forever now  
condemned, unchained, to fight*

I took it out and there was another beneath it, smaller and from a different bar, with a seriously stained corner labeled April 28. The one below that was folded and labeled May 6. I lifted the poems out and moved over to the bed. I laid them out in order, retrieved the other napkin - the one from the Lost Night, the one I had found Quinn reading - and I put it in its place.

Looking at them together, I could remember writing some of them quite clearly. I recalled the bar and what I had to drink and who was there and my own thoughts linked to the poems. But some, I had no recollection of at all, though I had clearly written them. I thought, also, that there were some missing. I could remember bars between, though not the words.

I stood in the fading opulence of the boudoir like a electutist in the silk gown and read the words aloud into the white silence:

*April 16*

*These worlds do not speak of wisdom*

*These words of longing cry:*

*Stillness- - - - - .*

*Touch taste see time rush by.*

*Memory scribed unhinged*

*Bustling rustling flight*

*stopped in screams forever now  
condemned, unchained, to fight*

*April 28*

*Flesh dreams.*

*wind of breath.*

*Tongue curls.*

*drop nectar sweet.*

*Orbs behold glittering.*

*angels.*

*glories of lamp lit shadowed.*

*street.*

*May 6*

*Swords on Crimson below*

*Outline spirit shine*

*Sayers spoke Venus*

*Seers saw divined*

*Walk into the Sun*

*and the Fire consumes*

*passes once and twice,*

*and third the Fire booms.*

*May 14*

*time slips & streams & stops*

*Past tomorrow is yesterdays yesterday*

*Leather skinned heart & Silver spiral*

*Spins word*

*Spins world*

*Spins whirled past*

intention attends atonement  
Fire walks with me last.  
Memory's memory reminded not  
Odin flies from the isle  
Smitten's written in oracle  
but the bird has the file.

May 27

Tick tock  
Tick tock  
Sun goes by  
Clock has stopped  
Gong chime  
Time sounds  
Lost aint gone  
til king has crown  
Dong dong  
Tower bells sing  
Your path determined  
Before the last ring

June 4

Green grunt now groan  
flowers fallen. father.  
bleed bound atone  
guide spikes

*spiked sparks  
delve and bring the spring  
Lost & split & found & bound:  
I remember everything.*

*June 15*

*'What is this?' I say  
my life laid before  
Replied 'Your life as it goes the proper way.'  
And I, 'But what if this is not as I wish?'  
I yearn to explore, I am destined to stray.  
Something beyond, above and below  
sparkling stars afar glow in the sun of day.*

The room seemed very quiet and alien when I finished reading and fell to silence. The walls seemed to be considering in judgment. I liked the strange plays on sounds and words. Reading them aloud reminded me why I had left them, given them to the world instead of keeping them: There was a beauty to them and, it seemed, a meaning just outside my understanding. Part of me had always hoped, when I left them, that they would mean something to someone else.

*Clearly they did. Strange and Beautiful.*

My eyes continued to explore the napkins and I found bits and parts jumped out at me.

"Orbs behold glittering." I read out aloud again. It put me in mind of Quinn's shirts and the way the buttons always caught my focus, all sparkly and shiny.

"Flowers fallen. Father." I read and I thought of Erin - not the vampire girl I knew - but the blank faced child in the picture with her father she had

shown me. I could see that blank faced child changed to a goddess of vengeance descending on that grim man.

I shook myself out of imaginings and browsed the collection of napkin poetry again. A lot of it just felt strangely relevant, though I could not have told you why or what. I could remember with incredible clarity sitting in a loud bar in the Fremont area writing the lines:

*Touch taste see time rush by.*

*Bustling rustling flight.*

But I had been a different person, one that knew so very little. But the words were...wise. Despite the opening disclaimer, they spoke of wisdom. A small part of me was frightened by them, the unknown quality of their essence.

I stacked them back in order in the box.

I thought about going out into the world in this dress and I thought about how Quinn said the leather outfit couldn't be managed alone.

I thought I could manage it.

I couldn't manage it. After struggling with it for a good while and getting most of the straps in the right place, I still couldn't get the hooks in the back.

A bang told me that there was someone on the other side of the door, in the bar's cellar room. I collected my bag and turned out the lights and unlocked the door.

The guy in the room didn't look shocked that a shelf had swung out from a secret room. I was a little disappointed. He looked a little surprised, but not like he was terrified or ready to call the cavalry. That part was reassuring.

"Could you help me?" I said to his agape face, then turned my back to him, "Can you get the hook in the middle? I can't seem to reach it no matter what I do." I felt his warm hands finding the pieces and putting



them in place. I could smell his blood smell, but the fumes of wine and liquor and hops drowned it out a little, made it easier to ignore the Thirst.

"You're all set." He said, and I smiled over my shoulder at him, taking care not to flash my fangs as I walked up the stairs to the bar.

## Chapter 3



### Adam

Erin often followed Vex in the evening. In part due to sheer curiosity that had not abated with decades of watching, and in part due to a sisterly concern for the boy. She never worried about Crae, he would take care of himself, through pure bravado if nothing else. Vex was vulnerable, sensitive, and Erin felt he walked the line of breaking every night.

Vex did not hunt. He did not seek or seduce. Vex submitted.

Of all the vampires she had ever known, Vex was the only one who found no pleasure in the blood. He drank because it sustained him, and he submitted to the Thirst to do the deed. He submitted to keep himself separate from it, Erin believed.

He walked the streets every night until he could give over to his Hyde-self. He did not struggle to control it or lose it when he had a victim in his sites, he just submitted when submission was an offered choice and drank from whoever was nearest. Young or old, rich or poor, man or woman; it made no difference. He was indiscriminate.

Occasionally, Erin had distracted him at that critical moment of submission. To save him from taking a very young child. Or when he was near sailors on shore leave, because taking men in uniform always transported him back to that first awful night. Once, she had distracted him to stop him from taking the one that she, herself, was hunting. But mostly she just watched.

He had wandered far, this night, further than he usually did. She guessed he was thinking about Titian and Quinn. He meandered street to street at a normal, jaunting human pace. His long brown hair was like a clock pendulum, swinging side to side from where it was bound at the nape of his neck. The unique and commercial feeling of Fremont was replaced by a gentle, rich residential atmosphere as they entered the Queen Anne district. Where Fremont had been bustling with last minute shoppers, foodies on outdoor patios, and the early evening bar crowd, Queen Anne was a gentle stream of couples out for a constitutional before bed, dog walkers, and kids on bicycles racing back home

now that the street lights were on.

Erin stayed about half a block behind Vex, strolling casually. When he stopped suddenly at the gate to a very large mansion, she continued strolling closer, thinking he was finally giving in to his Thirst. She stopped suddenly as she felt the fear radiating off of Vex. He was staring at the gate. At what, Erin couldn't see because a tall fence blocked the view. Vex started shuffling backwards.

Erin thought to run and grab him and go as fast as she could, sort it all out later, but no sooner had the thought come to her head than two men appeared at either side of Vex and slightly behind, taking his upper arms firmly in their grasps. These men had on suits, with a sameness look about them that people associated with the FBI or the Men in Black. She knew from the tales that Crae and Vex had told her, that they must be Society Vampires. She dove over the hedge next to her, afraid of being seen by them and found herself in the yard next door to what she could only assume was a Society House. She moved silently and kept her guard up as she moved toward the fence between yards to peer through a knothole in the rustic looking barn wood.

Vex had been brought in the gate and right in front of hard-looking vampire. Erin could not tell looking at him if he had been 20 or 40 when he had come to the moon. Unlike the enforcer vampires, his look was more stylish. Yes, stylish was the best word: His suit was expensive and under it's collar he wore a deep crimson scarf. His blond hair was cut short and choppy in the back and around one side of the front, but the right side of his face was hidden by long locks, down to his cheekbone.

"Vex." He said. His voice was little more than a whisper, but Erin could hear layers of tone and meaning in the one word as it pierced through the quiet yard.

"Adam." Vex's face and voice were blank, but his eyes were like pits, cold and terrified.

"I come here hunting one thing and I find something else entirely." Adam sounded jovial. "You, Vex, are a pleasant surprise."

"Fuck you." Vex replied. "Let me go or I will rip off your other foot this time. "

Adam laughed, throwing his head back. His enforcers took a stronger grip

on Vex's arms and Vex just stood there, a cold raging inferno on a tiny island with the Thirst a rising all around him.

"That is what I have missed about you." Adam said, his dignified speech slipping into a slight American southern accent as he spoke through the last of his laughter, "your ferocity. You stumble back to me just on the edge of the beast, how perfect. Perfect." He addressed the goons. "Put him inside in my office. Wrist and ankles. Watch him. I will hunt alone tonight."

Erin sat still as a stone, watching through the knothole as Adam disappeared in speed out the gate and the enforcers took Vex into the house. Erin wondered why he did not just give way to the Thirst. The goons would have a hard time matching Vex's beast. But then, Vex had never been able to let loose the Thirst at will in that way and he had never really been a fighter. Erin was, but by the time she thought it, they were closing the door. Those two enforcers were only the tip of the iceberg, who knew how many more were inside and if they took her too, there would be no one to call the cavalry.

She snuck out of the yard and down the street at all haste heading north.



The bar above the boudoir was hopping, but not crowded. There were a few artsy types and some tourists generally sticking to their own sides: Artists at the tables, tourists at the bar. I kept myself open a crack as I walked through. I wasn't sure why or what I was looking for, but I was open to a connection. I had decided to head north, to the cemetery up in Northgate, but I did not want to depend on someone else to sate this Thirst. I would seek an opportunity as I walked the wire.

Outside, a group stood around the entrance, smoking. I had smoked a few times, socially, because the smoker's club was an instant camaraderie. I enjoyed that about smokers. A blond with a hipster haircut stood behind the main group, appraising me without shame. I walked over to him, unafraid.

"Can I bum a smoke?" I asked. His eyes were blue like a river on a cloudless day. He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a cigarette case of plain, embossed silver. He clicked it open, offering the contents to me. I took one and put it to my lips. He closed the case and flipped it in his hand, flicking as it turned to light the small lighter on the corner of it.

*Slick, for truth.*

I looked at him, my eyebrow slightly raised as I lit the end and blew out that first drag. I almost wished I had kept the other dress on, this felt so Ingrid Bergman.

Through the crack in my armor, I could feel his appreciation for me, of me. I realized that the feeling was not new. I had felt men looking at me with that objective appreciation for years, but I had thought it my own vanity, my own hubris. How easily we dismiss the connection between person and person. Now, with the string a less ephemeral thing, I explored the tenuous connection. The blond boy held a coldness, a reserve in him that seemed older than his years.

I realized, suddenly that he, too, was a vampire. I could suddenly smell with sharp acuity that everyone else around us was human. I could smell their hopes and sadness and sickness and strength and I could smell him, wine with dinner and cheese cake. He smiled at my realization, showing just the slightest hint of fang.

I smiled back and wondered what there was to say. Wondered what the damned could really say to the damned. And in front of all these people? We could speak in aphorisms and codes, I suppose, and the image of a spy came to me again, deepening my smile.

"Thanks." It was the only thing really to say to the boy and I walked away, down the street and out of sight without looking back.

As soon as I turned the corner, I started running.

I ran up the hills until I was running up hills that weren't terra firma and stopped running with my legs and ran with my mind, flying over the Space Needle and the Hendrix Experience Music building with it's strange contortions and north.

*I am flying south, towards the stars and straight on 'til morning.*

*'Til morning. I suddenly realize that the sky is lighter in the east, much much lighter and I can feel the light and the heat from the sun that I can't see yet. I realize I am way, way far above the city looking down on where Seattle gives way to the pine trees. I start descending, but I am still heading south. I don't know how to turn around and the sun is coming up as fast as I am going down. Quinn never told me what happened at dawn, but instinct and every vampire story I ever heard tells me it wouldn't be good.*

*I start descending faster. I won't die from hitting the ground but if I just crash down, I might not heal fast enough. I might not be able to find shelter before the sun finds me. There is a town, a small city in front of me, I imagine myself as a parachute glider, coming in running on landing and that is exactly what I do on a small, residential, dead end street. The neighborhood is quiet, early morning quiet. But, I can hear life signs of people in the buildings as I walk down the street. People turning over and grunting in the last minutes before dawn, an alarm clock beginning to shout, a woman singing in her kitchen. The stucco building with a rental sign in the front yard is all quiet and it feels empty to me. There is no entrance in the front, so I go around back. There are no cars. I try the doors to the ground floor apartments: locked. I try upstairs. One is open. The windows in the living room point north. I open one of the windows and close the shades as well as I can.*

*There is a dark nook behind a half wall that hopefully won't get any sun. I wonder what Quinn did, if he followed me. Then I am split into a thousand pieces by the sun cresting the horizon.*

## Chapter 4



### Blood and Wrath

The memory only took the space of a heartbeat to slam into my mind and when I snapped out of it, I was pleased to find that I was still flying. I wondered if I could just land, the way that Quinn did yesterday. I see the graveyard ahead and decide.

*There is no shame in a running stop.*

Okay, so it was more of a tumbling stop and one that would have gotten a million-plus hits on YouTube, if anyone had been lurking in the graveyard with a smart phone. But the point is that I did, in fact, land after a manner of speaking and right in front of the odd pyramid crypt at that. My once pristine white shirt was becoming interesting with blood stains that had been diluted and washed out by the lake, and now grass stains and gravel marks. My body was pristine after only a moment of laying in the grass. Hurting didn't even really hurt anymore, it was just a physical sensation.

The metal door boomed like a gong when I pounded on it with the flat of my fist.

I waited.

I banged again and opened my senses to the pyramid. I could feel someone inside. I recalled how Erin had opened herself that first night, radiating a sort of perfect love and perfect trust like a password.

*Perfect love and perfect trust. I enter this place with perfect love and perfect trust.*

The door opened and Crae was standing there. He smiled wide when he saw me.

"You're the second unexpected pleasure tonight has brought to this door. The night has barely lost the twilight. Good start." He said, standing out of the way



of the entrance and gesturing me in.

I waited until the door was secured again, and we stood in the dim light of the candles and the fast fading sunset lights from the tower windows to say, "Erin said I might stop by tonight. She said you..."

*How do I put this?*

"Crae always has some willing around," I said, imitating the crazy girl's lilting accent. The impression sent him laughing, stepping back and bending at the waist with it. I realized how truly dynamic Crae was. His empathic sense was reserved, but his physicality was of extreme motion and action. Compared to Quinn, he seemed boffish, but it worked for him. It contained his charm.

"Tis true lass, o and that be for certain." He responded in his own lilt, then continued seriously, "I do seem to make a lot of friends."

He took a few steps and threw himself into a flip, straightening and falling through the open hole in the floor. I smiled to the candles, shaking my head before I jaunted to the hole and simply stepped through and down.

Crae was standing the the beanbag circle with only one other person, a man and one I had never seen before. He was taller than Crae and dressed like a traveler. Through his ripped and patched and ripped again jeans and thin shirt, I could see he had a wiry muscularity that spoke of hard work and lean times. His hair was shaved on either side of a mohawk, the red tips of it were starting to flag and fall, but the purple base was solid and standing straight up against gravity.

"This is Wrath," Crae introduced, "Wrath, Titian."

The boy smiled at me as he took my hand and kissed inside my wrist. The smile made him look young and boyish. The kiss was sensual and strange. No one had ever kissed the inside of my wrist before. His eyes

were roguish and unabashed looking into mine.

"Don't any of your street demons have real grown-up names?" I quoted, taking back my hand.

"This isn't the really real world." Wrath tailored a quote back at me from the same flick. Crae looked from me to him, lost. "It's the movie *The Crow*, man." Wrath told him, "Being a vampire is no excuse for falling behind on culture."

"It was released in 1994." I said.

"Exactly, look how far behind you are! A decade."

"Do I get points," Crae countered, "for being an actor in a twisted slasher film?"

"Yes!" Wrath responded with a laugh, "And I would very much like to hear that tale some night, but I should head out." He walked toward the ladder, grabbing a beat up army bag from the floor.

"Do you have somewhere to be?" Crae asked.

"I thought you might want some space with your lady friend," Wrath said frankly, with a hint of a have-an-apple-little-girl smile, "and I have some folks I can catch up with tonight."

"Can you stay?" Crae asked, walking to stand between us, creating a triangle, "Titian is..."

I took the opening, "I am new." I said simply.

Wrath dropped his bag on the floor, "Absolutely."

The silence of heartbeats seemed infinite.

I broke the silence, "I watched a documentary a while back. There was a commune in the hills in California and after dinner one night they were all sitting around the common room. One person said, 'you know what we should do! We should have an orgy.' They all nodded and said, 'yeah, man! Good idea. Let's do that.' Then they all sat there and looked at each other. No one knew how to get it started."

Both men laughed a little at the story.

"That is what I feel like." I continued, "I don't really remember how I got here and every time I have

fed it has just happened. I don't know how to make it happen."

"You make it happen by being open to what is happening." Crae said, moving back a step into the shadows.

Wrath stepped toward me, his body language non-threatening and his guard open. His presence was warm and inviting, but with an undercurrent of danger, of violence. I might be able to tear him apart with my super strength, but he would fight to the end. I let my mental door swing wide open.

*All or nothing, I suppose.*

The thought bothered me and Wrath picked up on it.

"What are you scared of?" He asked, very neutral staying a step away, but his blue eyes were focused on mine, unafraid.

"That it is all or nothing." I replied, voicing the thought. "That I won't be able to control it and I will destroy you." The image of the destroyed styrofoam container flashed in my mind and the Thirst spiked in me. I could feel the ferocity of the teeth in my mouth, I could feel my breath leaving me, brushing my lips, I could taste the smell of the human boy's blood. I could smell Crae off to the side, like a pie in the oven.

I adjusted to the feeling, to the pressure without taking my eyes off of Wrath. He took a small step closer. Open to me as he was, I could sense no fear in him. He radiated excitement and exuberance and attraction.

"You could kill me." He said. It was a statement of truth. He continued moving closer to me slowly, never dropping his eyes, "If you attacked me, if you tricked me into letting you drink from my neck, if Crae wasn't here to stop you, you could kill me. But you aren't going to attack me. You are stronger than that, and..." He looked deeply into me, as though he could see my very soul as our open empathy began to mingle,

as though testing each other, "and you are mightily determined." He smiled and it was a smile that made me smile back, "Plus, you won't trick me into drinking from my neck because I know better."

Crae's voice came from deep in the shadows of the room, "I won't let you kill him, but I don't think you will need me. Titian, you really don't understand: You have a better control of the Thrist than most vampires have after 50 years. It is, well, it's incredible."

I realized that I couldn't feel Crae at all. He was completely closed off, leaving the two of us to focus on each other, standing a foot apart in the pool of light filtering from the crypt upstairs.

"If I am not biting your neck, where am I biting you?" I asked, eyebrow raised and a hint of coyness. He was close enough that I could touch him if I reached my arm out.

"How new are you?" Wrath asked, there was no undercurrent of anything in him. His question was his question.

"This is my third night Awake."

His eyes widened, then he smiled. "Practically a virgin."

"But you're not."

"No," He said simply, closing half of the small distance between us, "I'm not." He smiled from a breath away and the smile promised unspoken things.

I could feel his swirl of memories, the emotions of a hundred experiences with other vampires - some over and over again, some just the once - running through him uncaged and without judgement. It washed around us, becoming a piece of this experience. Bringing us together in a common place of understanding.

"You can bite my wrist," He said, bringing his left hand up to caress my hair, bringing the scent of his blood to the forefront of my senses. "Or if you want to take some time about it, you can bite here," his

shoulder, "and here," pectoral, "and here" abdomen, "and lower. But not there." He qualified, gesture not needed, with a boyish grin.

"Why?" I asked softly. His eyes went wide and he started to step back. I grabbed his wrist, laughing. "Not why not there." I took a breath to compose myself from giggling, "I mean why are you doing this? I am going to hurt you. I am going to take your blood, use you. Why are you willing? What do you want?"

"What did you want? Do you remember?"

I let his wrist slide loose and he slid his hand down to intertwine loosely with mine while I considered the questions. His hand felt warm and electrical. "I remember deciding. I don't remember...." My mind flashed to the chaise lounge with Quinn and that incredible kiss. I didn't remember him biting me, but I remembered what I wanted.

"Freedom." I told him, "I wanted freedom."

"I want this." Wrath replied, quietly, moving his head next to mine to speak for my ear alone. "Just this. This moment, this experience with a beautiful girl and with full openness and with truth. Hurt is relative. Pain is an experience. Suffering is a choice. You have been hurt since you changed, does it feel like it did when you were human?"

"No." We were as close as we could be without being pressed together. I could feel the beating aliveness radiating from his body.

"I don't need to be a vampire to take pain without fear. Everyone is using each other all the time, that doesn't make it bad."

I breathed in the coppery scent of the blood flowing beneath the tanned skin of his neck. "I could take your neck right now." I whispered back into his ear, before reaching my mouth to take the thick dangling metal ring hanging through his earlobe carefully in my fang and pulling on it. I flicked it

off my fang with my tongue and brought my head back to look at him. My mouth was open, my breath rapid, and my fangs bared to him resting gently on my bottom lip. My tongue flicked out to touch my top lip, then back in my mouth. His breath was quickening, his blood pumping faster. I could see it. I could smell it. I could taste the promise of it in the air between us.

I moved slowly back towards his neck. Our auras were swirling around us, our intentions. His trust fully balanced against my balance with my Thirst and every motion swayed the balance, tipping one way then the other as I slowly scraped my tongue along the outline of the veins pounding in his neck. I could feel his heart beating in my mouth and I drank the salty flavor of his skin and my senses danced in the knowledge of the salty blood just beneath.

I moved my face away from his neck in impossibly long seconds and buried my teeth into the firm muscle of his shoulder. Wrath did not pull away or fight, but with the same slow, conscious movements he brought his arm around my waist, flexing the muscle to spray blood into my mouth as I removed my bite and drew the line of my body along the line of his.

The Thirst wanted to take over from here, but I held it in balance, letting the blood wash through my experience, through the Thirst. The Thirst wanted so much more. It wanted to strike, to be sated in an instant. I wanted to take my time and I did. I licked the blood that continued to trickle from the wounds, then sucked them, flicking my tongue into the hole I had made. He drew in a breath through teeth and I knew it had hurt. I brought my head up and his eyes watched my face. I could see the pain in the muscles around his eyes, but his eyes didn't look wounded. They looked passionate and alive.

I let my Thirst ride hand-in-hand with my own curiosity and passion.

"Can you take another bite?" I asked in a low growl of a voice without breaking the spell.

"Close the first." He responded, his own voice thick and his hand coming up to brush through the coiled texture of my hair. My brows drew together and my mind stumbled.

*Close the first?*

"Your blood." He answered the thought with his words as he descended, with a kiss, with his own human teeth, taking my lip and biting hard. I made an involuntary sound as he drew blood to the surface and pulled his face back away from mine. My tongue flicked out to taste my own saltiness and I went back to his shoulder. A little more blood had come to the clotting surface of his wound and I licked it carefully away, before kissing the wound with my bloody healed lips. I could feel the small punctures closing under my mouth.

He turned me about with his arm still around me, like a dance. Like a tango. He sat down, deep and far back in the bean bags and as he sat his arm slid from my waist, until he held my hand in his. He drew me down onto to sit, facing the candles, away from him, my back to his front. I leaned against him and his arms enfolded me. His aura and self swirled around me and mine enveloped him so that every move was like a dance as we responded, countering each other naturally, effortlessly. He turned his head and his neck was so close, but I wouldn't trust myself with his neck under my fangs with his blood taste still in my throat. I turned my head to his and our foreheads meet, eyes the windows of all that swirled around us.

His arms tightened, embracing, and my arms matched his, embracing myself. I could feel the leather of my outfit under my hands and arms, like armor. I ran my lips along his bicep. The muscle was tense stretching the skin over it, thin. I could feel the fibers of his muscle under it, but muscle wasn't what I wanted.

Wrath lifted his arm high, over my shoulder as I brought my hands up to guide the crook of his arm to my open mouth. My teeth found the spot behind his tendons where they could slip in and pierce the arteries and veins. My hands were like iron rings, keeping Wrath's arm locked in place as his body naturally tried to pull away from the pain. He held me tighter around the waist, pulling me into himself as he expelled his breath onto my neck and bit his human teeth into the muscle between my neck and shoulder.

I locked my mouth onto the soft skin as his arm tensed then relaxed, sending the blood spilling into me. The blood flow tapered. I dug my nails into his arm and sucked on the wound, and he tensed making the blood flow again and drawing a grunt from deep inside him. He released my neck from his teeth and put his head against the back of mine, breathing in the bar boudoir smell of my hair before relaxing his arm and tensing it, making the blood come in spurts. I licked gently at the wound and he relaxed and sunk back in the bean bags further. I sunk with him, my head laying on his chest.

"Are you done?" I asked.

He slowly brought his head to kiss the side of mine. "Yes. I am spent." He said in my ear. He bit the top of it gently and amended, "For now."

It swirled around us, this decision. The Thirst wasn't satisfied. He wasn't a vampire and I hadn't drained him completely. I hadn't even drained him a lot. But I would not take more, I simply would not. My resolve stood up like a wall and the Thirst paced the edge of it, seeking for a weakness. Not finding one, it receded, faded. I might need to feed again like this later tonight, but for now, I was good. I was in control.

I scraped my tongue along my sharp vampire tooth and brought his arm up to me to lick the wound, closing



it. He brought the healed arm back around me to hold me tightly, and I held him and it was just two people together in comfort and understanding without the Thirst or the pain or the passion.

"Why are you known as Wrath?" Relaxed in his arms, the name seemed incongruous.

"You weren't the least bit pushy." He cryptically responded and I could see him fighting, like afterimages in my mind.

"Why don't you want...this?" I asked, because it had been clear and was clear in his intentions, still mingling with mine like a haze around us: He did not want to be a vampire. I could understand wanting to be fed on as a step in a process, an experience toward a goal because it was what I had done. I couldn't wrap my head around just being fed from.

"Someday I might, but this - what we just had and did and where we are now is enough. Of itself. Maybe it will be more. Maybe there will be another night with us. Maybe another night I will be done or I will want the gift, but for tonight there is tonight."

The feeding had scaled the walls that were between us, as few things can. We were one mind and comprehension transcended words and I agreed.

*Tonight there is tonight.*

My mind wandered to earlier that evening, waking in the boudoir and his mind traveled there with me, like a ghost at my shoulder. I suddenly wanted to take him there, to meet him there some night. I could see him sitting at the bar, standing outside with the smokers in the fading light of dusk. My mind flickered briefly away from my fantasy, to the meeting with the blond vampire earlier. I felt Wrath immediately tense behind me, sparking me out of my dreaming.

"Who was the blond man you just thought of?" He asked and the question was important. I felt no jealousy from Wrath, just intensity and a sudden rush

of fear. It was strange. Incongruous, to feel fear from this boy, this human, who had felt no fear with my teeth at his neck, no fear as I sucked his blood and held my life in my hand. I brought the blond hair and the face to my mind again, the casual long blond hair down the left side of his face, the dapper feeling and him lighting the slender white cigarette.

"I don't know his name. He is a vampire. He was outside a bar and I bummed a smoke from him on my way out. I don't think we spoke ten words. Why?" I asked, "Who is he?"

He didn't close himself from me as we got up from the beanbags and I didn't close myself from him. We stayed connected as I followed him into the darkness and down a short, curved tunnel to another lit room, where Crae sat on a cushioned black couch with the blond girl from last night, Aleese.

*Huh. There is more than one room.*

I had thought that it was just that one space. Now I wondered how many tunnels led off from the darkness.

"I thought you were hiding discretely in the shadows making sure I didn't kill him." I accused. Crae smiled at Aleese and turned to give me a shrug.

"You didn't need me playing wing man that close." He stated.

Wrath interjected before we could begin to banter, "I think Titian saw Adam this morning."

## Chapter 5



### Past and Present

The name Adam fell like a stun grenade in the room. Crae and Titian both starred, mouths agape, at Wrath, then at each other. Crae gently stroked Aleese's hair, getting up and leaving her lounged on the couch as he moved to sit on the arm of the chair near the boy and the vampire.

Titian realized that Crae was splitting his empathy. The part of himself focused on the human girl was calm and gentle, while the aura reaching toward herself and Wrath was intently open, mingling with their own to create a bubble of their combined aura around them. It reminded Titian of how her sister and she would fight with each other as children, while still keeping calm and quiet not to set their baby brother crying.

"Tell me." Crae said, snapping Titian's attention back to the present.

Titian repeated the story of her brief encounter in Pioneer Square, but the images were interspersed with memories of memories and pieces from the journal. Titian was frightened and scattered.

"Focus," Crae instructed her, "Focus on his face." Titian closed her eyes and thought of his, those bright deep blue eyes, the lock of hair. Her mind recalled the wide cheekbones and the thin lips.

"That is Adam." Crae's voice was toneless, but his fear rode the aura, tinging it like a drop of food coloring in water. Wrath was starting to look very pale. He was afraid and weakened by the blood lost to Titian.

"Crae," he said, "You have to take this one from here. I need to sit." Crae nodded at him, losing himself in thought as Wrath dropped into a corner of the sofa near Aleese.

"Adam." Titian whispered. "It's a common enough name." She told herself.

"Titian," Crae lifted her face to his with a hand, "Tell me. Where do you know him from? Why does the name Adam mean something?"

"Adam is a monster. He killed Ella." Titian said matter-of-factly. When she saw the blank look, she searched for an explanation. "I don't know all of the story. I know he raped her, he turned her to a vampire so that he could break her, but she

got away and then he...he killed her. Somehow. A long time ago. It has to do with Quinn.”

Titian examined Crae’s face. “How do you know Adam? If it is the same Adam.”

“It is the same Adam.” Crae said, definitively, then looking back at the humans, stood and lead Titian back down to the main room. “He is the vampire that brought me to the moon. And you are right: He is a monster.”

“You said that a society brought you over.” Titian said.

“They did, through him. I got into a bad spot in Reno a long time ago, during the rush there. I lost everything and more. Adam offered me an out: Work for him for a year and the debt would be settled. It sounds so stupid now, but it made sense at the time. It started as just running errands, business bullshit. Then he started using me for blood.” Crae shuttered mentally at the memory. “First only every now and again, but after a while he fed off me every night, until I was weak with it. Ill.

“Then one day, I woke up and I had this raging burning Thirst and I knew he had changed me.” There was so much more of the story, so much he was holding away from her and away from himself. But the details of his story were not important right now. He summed up what mattered: “Adam is evil, Titian. What we have inside us, this thing that we fight because it doesn’t care or have morals or compassion or love; Adam is all of that embodied.”

They both mentally stepped back from the ledge of memories; Crae his own, and Titian from the inherited flash memories of Quinn.

“I don’t think the Society started off as a horrible thing,” Crae told her, “I think it was a banding of people in the same situation, a system of governance when it came over here from the continent. But Adam tainted it, somehow, twisted it until it became the dark thing that it is now with enforcers and hunters and leaders. The society has Houses in every city.”

They lapsed again into silence. Titian wished Quinn were there. Crae wanted Erin and Vex back in the lair safe that moment.

“Why is he here? If they have houses in every city, why Seattle?” Titian asked. Crae just shook his head. He had avoided the Society in all it’s forms since he and Vex had escaped from Adam a century ago. They weren’t important enough to bring Adam to Seattle. The Society had only actively hunted for the

two escapees for a few years. Still, Crae knew that Adam would hold the grudge for centuries. The thought that he was here, in this city, was terrifying to Crae.

A boom on the floor above them shook down dust onto the two vampires and brought them out of their dark thoughts. Crae started for the ladder, but before he had taken more than a step, Erin suddenly appeared jumping down through the hole.

“Adam.” She said, breathless and looking into the shadows of the room like a twitchy cat. “The Society vampire named Adam. He has Vex. He took him.”

“Why would he want Vex?” Titian asked them.

“Vex doesn’t ride the Thirst.” Erin told her, “He doesn’t reason with it or control it or let it touch him, he can’t. He just submits to it and it rages free until it is sated.”

“Adam knows Vex. He used him as a weapon,” Crae took over, “or as an amusement for himself. He would keep Vex chained and unfed for days or give him rabbits and puppies and rats to drink from for weeks, then he would loose him and the Thirst would take him for hours at a time, decimating everything.”

A silence while Titian and Erin absorbed this.

“That is how I got us away,” Crae finally confessed, “I managed to free Vex at the height of his Thirst when only Adam was around. Vex didn’t kill him, obviously, but he damaged him enough that we got away.”

Titian felt overwhelmed. Vex, he had seemed so sweet and gentle, so damaged and so eager to find Quinn and find a way to fix himself. Quinn. Somehow this all started with Quinn and every path led back to him.

*Fuck your rules.* Titian thought. She gathered all of her will, all of her fear, and confusion, and wrapped it in a single focused ball and she launched it screaming out the target: “Quinn!”



Titian’s cry hit Quinn like a lightning bolt. It broke over him and her fears and her confusion washed down over him. He was bombarded by disjointed images, of Vex and of his Ella, he recognized the insane little vampire from the bridge in the flashes, though other faces were unknown to him. Finally, Adam’s face materialized. Not as he had been those hundreds of years ago, but as he was

now.

Titian was open to him over all the miles, like a beacon and she needed him. He wouldn't, he couldn't let her near Adam.

"She is too new." He whispered to the darkness around him, "She can't face him yet."

He was suddenly airborne, a dark comet streaking north.



Crae had Erin replay the whole event, over and over. Each time, some parts were clarified, and some lost forever but their absence was noted. I started to shut down, it was so much. It was too much. I shut myself apart.

Crae turned from Erin to me, putting his hands squarely on my shoulders, "Stay with us, Titian." He took my chin between his fingers, forcing my eyes to his, "Don't close yourself away. Stay with us."

"I don't understand what is going on!" I yelled in his face, opening the roaring inferno inside myself and pushing him away. Crae slammed against the wall, laughing.

"Yes!" He said, "Good!" He walked back over to me, held high. "Why do you want to know? Why do you need to understand?"

"He can't do this. Adam is the monster that took Ella. He hurt you. He's taken Vex. And I don't even know why! I don't know any of it, but I know that this is bullshit. Fuck him. He can't have Vex. I won't let him."

My resolve banded around the inferno in my heart and it focused it. It stoked the flame and it aimed it at Adam.

"What do you need to know?" Crae stood serious and poised, a general looking me in the eye.

The question stumped me. There was something I desperately needed to know, but I couldn't find any

words. Whatever it was I needed to know, I couldn't learn from Crae.

Pounding knocks *Bam! Bam! Bam!* rung through the crypt.

"It is Quinn." I said to Erin, not looking away from Crae, "Bring him to me." She didn't say a word as she went to do my bidding.

"There is more in this than you know," I told Crae, "and more than I understand."

He looked suddenly thoughtful and nodded, releasing his pressure on me. He stepped back a pace as Erin appeared through the hole in the ceiling, followed by Quinn. Erin seemed entranced by him, standing close and studying him in that circling, head tilting way she had. Quinn didn't take note, but stood like a statue of embattled royalty staring at me.

"This is not your fight, Titian." He said, finally.

"It is if I make it so." I replied.

"Not yet, Titian, please. I have been watching him, studying the Society house and it's habits. I will see what I can do to get Vex out, but you must wait. Just a few more nights, until you remember. Please." He walked closer and closer to me as he pleaded, while I carefully displayed a neutrality in my openness, keeping my intentions hidden.

"Please." He stood right in front of me.

I took his lapels gently in my hands and looked to his eyes.

"I have to know what he did to Ella." I said. His eyes flashed perplexed for only a moment, but it was all that I needed. I didn't imagine going fast, I just imagined my teeth buried in his neck and they were. I delved into him, with my very essence to pull out the memories of Ella. I could feel Erin reach out to put a hand on each of us and she guided me as I dived into his memories, without my even needing to ask her.

*Ella is bound against a wall. Held by chains and*

manacles bolted to the window frame. The room is posh, with high ceilings, intricate carved wood furniture, Japanese swords and British quarter staffs on the walls and deep carpet which feels obscene under my heavy booted feet. Adam sits at a desk within arms reach of Ella, reading the journal.

I look out through Quinn's eyes, noticing the stack of letters written in my hand that are sitting on Adam's desk and the silver locket around Ella's neck. I notice that other than the haircut, Adam looks exactly the same.

Ella catches my eye with her own. It is filled with defiance. She slowly tenses her muscles, pulling the chains binding her arms tight, moving them around. Loosening, looking for a weak point, an opportunity. All I can do is not provoke him, to keep him absorbed with my words, buying her time. Buying us time.

"It won't work." Adam says, suddenly capturing my Ella in his gaze. He gets up, leaving the journal. "Ah, Adelle. My Adelle, so defiant but not strong enough." He grabs her chin firmly.

"Hey!" I yell. "Leave her alone!" I don't have better words, but it works: He turns to me, circling around me like a cat.

"And you. Well, you are just unexpected. The little lord without a castle." He comes around me and searches my eyes, "But strong. Very strong." Adam smiles into my soul, "You have the defiance in you, too, and it will have to be broken. No worries, though, I know just how." He turns his back on me, turning to Ella again. I take the moment and jump onto his back, sinking my new fangs into his neck.

★

The memory within a memory is like a fire consuming. It moves so fast, but is so crisp and clear. I see him sweep Ella from the street with such speed that they are in the dingy town hotel room before



she even realizes what has happened. He doesn't bind her, but simply takes his first bite, drinking her scream with the quick spurt of blood. He heals her wound instantly with a bite of his finger and I am sure that she has bled more from scratches running through the woods. He is just beginning.

But the blood is Adam's and he is I. He and Quinn and Titian are all within, watching the fear in Ella's eyes as he rips a sleeve off the blouse effortlessly. We all feel his excitement, his elation at her fear. His desire for her fear.

It is eight hours of causing pain and fear and horror all in an instant. Ella grows weaker and weaker as he takes every innocence she has and blood with every innocence, until the crescendo.

Ella's breathing is hoarse. Adam stopped closing the wounds, hours ago, and the wounds mar her beautiful body. I crouch over her and grab the back of her head by the hair, lifting her to me. She can hardly do more than mewl, she is so weak.

"I think," I say, "that this was the most fun I have had in decades. I have the power to make it last a thousand years. I think it will take me a hundred to break you, sweet, sweet Adelle, and then the fun will really begin."

I release her head and she flops back on the floor. I straddle her chest, sitting on it and watching her struggle to breath as I bring my wrist to my mouth, tearing a chunk of the flesh off and spitting it to the side. The blood flows instantly into my mouth. I savor the taste as I bring her wrist up. As soon as I bite her wrist, she opens her mouth in silent pain, and I bring my own bleeding wrist to her mouth. She tries to fight, but her body is weak and her mind is not strong enough to withstand the instinct to drink the nourishing blood.

We are a cycle. As I drink from her, my body

transforms the blood and she drinks from me and is transformed. I watch as the bruises and slashes and punctures of the last eight hours heal and I can feel her wrist healing under my lips. I let it drop and sit there, on her chest, watching her transform unconscious.

Her eyes snap open and she is looking directly in my eyes. It is so unexpected that I jump up from her and she sits up, never taking her eyes from mine.

"I have seen the one who will eat your heart.  
Fire and ice, o fire and snow  
inside and outside burning and bright."

She stands effortlessly like a puppet on strings.

"My screams to the night are nothing to hers  
I am a sapling and she is born an oak,  
and she loves him more, though she'll never believe."

She smiles a far away smile as she leans back on a beam in the room, her hair getting trapped by the rough lumber as she tilts her head this way and that as though dancing.

"Lost little boy, you, little boy.  
Tricked and wiled your way to the crest  
But a country girl is the dime you spin on,  
Little boy, and the shadow will bring me to her."

Suddenly, she is gone. Just gone and the curtains rustle in the open window and I am not in that dingy hotel room, but in a posh room in Philadelphia being thrown from Adam's back and against the wall, collapsing on the floor near Ella.

\*

I look at my Ella and she looks at me and I know what happened to her that lost night. I lived it, I did those horrible things in living the memory and she knows. I can feel the hardness in her, the scar that Adam had made in her soul, but her love for me is like a salve. I had experienced it, but I did not create that scar. I can feel the resolve harden my own face,

as I turn back to Adam.

In the wreckage around me is a staff. I bring it with me as I stand.

Adam laughs.

"Oh, the two of you are true Colonists. Just defiant to the core." His face flashes to seriousness without a trace of humor, "If you are going to try to fight me, boy, come on."

I had some training as a child in fencing and boxing and quarterstaff. The Noble Battlegrounds I recalled my father calling. The staff feels familiar as I twirl it, experimentally, stepping closer in an offhanded way until I am close enough to suddenly swing in with an attack.

The staff moves perfectly, a move that would have optimally taken him surprised in the stomach and whirled to rap him on the side of the head, but he just isn't there. I turn behind me, surprised and en guard, but his open palm is just there. It is like iron hitting just below my cheek bone and sending me sprawling. I spit out broken bits of teeth, feeling the parts grow back in my mouth as my cheekbone knits back together.

Adam brings his arm back in and starts walking deliberately toward Ella. I run at him, staff overhead to jump and strike him with every ounce of my strength. He reaches casually up, without looking from Ella and catches the staff in his hands above him, stopping it dead. I continue moving and the staff breaks, leaving him with a short tapering stake of wood ragged on the end and me on the floor again with a long lance, ragged and tapered.

"Do you know," he says to Ella, dragging the sharp stick down her neck, down her collarbone and chest, to expose the cleavage hidden by men's shirt she is wearing, "Do you know that when vampires are pierced through the heart with wood, it bursts into flame?" He

asks her as I get to my feet again, unsteady on just healed legs and ankles.

Adam spins back to me and strikes into my shoulder with the sharp stick, pulling it out again, just as painfully. A scream, hoarse and deep is ripped from me as small pieces of wood smolder in the wound, one catching on fire and another as the wound tries to heal and is damaged again by the flaming splinters.

"I can break your body all night and every night for a decade, boy." He says in my face, "but what I really want is to break this righteousness in you that I can feel in my head like a rabid wolf. You are still a human in your mind. I will strip you of that and you will thank me."

He throws the spike in the air and snags it out of the air with his other hand, then stabs it into my other shoulder. I tried to block him, to stop him, but I am just not fast enough and the first shoulder is still healing. I don't let myself scream but only grunt as he sweeps my legs letting my fall release his weapon. Without another glance at me, he turns back to Ella.

"I can keep hurting him all night, but I don't think that hurting him will break you. I think that hurting you will break him." He drags her face to him for a kiss, as she struggles away from him, using the iron chains as her lifelines. She bites his lip, and he moans the pain and is distracted.

I can feel his pain and the pleasure of it for him. It is part of the air and I can not escape it. I have no idea how he is doing this thing, forcing me - us - to feel what he is feeling, but I do not let it deter me.

I use a single, simple motion. I am imagining the lance going through his heart. He is too quick again, but not quick enough. Adam turns to me and the lance pierces through his abdomen and up through his back on

the wrong side. He coughs blood and winces as the lance starts to smolder. He crouches down. I can see Ella standing behind him.

"We have now reached," he says in a rough, breathless way, "the breaking point."

From his crouched position, he leaps like a frog backward into Ella. The lance sticking out his back, the lance I brought into the fight and gave to him in this way, pierces into Ella. The lance is suddenly a stick of fire, and both Ella and Adam scream with its burning. The end turns to char and falls and Adam flings himself away from Ella. There is a hole burning in her chest as she screams and I can see flames coming out of her throat as the screaming stops. Her eyes are on mine as they, too, burn and the last thing I feel from her is so clear it is as though she spoke it.

Don't try to kill him. Wait for Titian.

Then she is so much ash smoldering the obscenely thick carpet and the iron rings are empty.

Adam is lying on the floor behind his desk, still writhing and not quite healed. My eyes dart from the ash to the blond vampire to a sword on the wall.

Don't kill him.

I kick him as hard as I can in the side, then take my journal and the letters from the desk. I go to one knee by the ashes that were Ella and I put my hand on the floor into the still-warm ashes. My hand lands on something hard and unexpected on the carpet. I bring my hand up and I look at the locket. The little silver locket that she couldn't leave without.

## Chapter 6



### Epiphany

I pulled slowly back from Quinn, keeping his lapels in my hands. A tear ran down his cheek. I felt a matching tear run down my own. We didn't speak. We didn't need to. The cold resolve was in both of us, it was ours. It was not swirling or winding, it was simply one.

*I am the one she spoke of.*

That thought suddenly reeled me back. I could see the individual parts of it. I had been so focused on knowing what was going to happen, that I hadn't thought about what had happened. The strangeness of Ella right after Adam brought her to the moon came to mind. Quinn's fever dreams, when he was still William on a boat to the New World flashed.

"Did you have the same strangeness, right after you changed? Like Ella?"

He stared at me, then licked his lips, staying locked and blank carefully. I held his eyes as I walked over to my bag on the floor and walked back to him pulling out the envelope: Open When You Remember.

I dropped the bag and felt the envelope with my fingers. Words suddenly came to my lips from earlier:

"These worlds do not speak of wisdom. These words of longing cry: Stillness."

In the heartbeats after my voice was silent, I could feel the stillness in the essence swirling around me. In Crae and Erin and Quinn, far down the passage I could feel it in Aleese and Wrath. Stillness.

I spoke the rest of the words into that stillness:

"Touch taste see time rush by. Memory scribed lost and found. Bustling in rustling flight stopped in screams forever now condemned, unchained, to fight."

The last word was like a collective sigh, the stillness broken. Erin and Crae looked at each other, while Quinn just tilted his head, studying me. I looked at the envelope.

"Memory scribed lost and found." I said quietly. I thought of Quinn's journal, of the brief mention of his fever dream again and wondered what he had dreamed. I wondered if he remembered or if it had been lost like a poem composed in your mind right before you fall asleep.

"Scribed." I thought of the napkins. I had a book of my poems from high school. They were wretched pentameter things and free-form conscious writings from class assignments. Mostly dealing with my relationships with my family, Freud would likely say. I reread them when I started a poetry class in college and dropped the class but kept writing, leaving it to be lost.

"Lost." I wondered if I had experienced a strangeness like Ella. Maybe Quinn had written it down and that was what was in here.

I looked at Quinn. His face and aura were completely blank, but he was watching me intently. I tore open one end of the envelope while I watched his eyes and dropped the content out into my hand.

It was cloth. I closed my eyes and brought it to my nose and inhaled. It smelled musty and feminine and like wine and blood.

"Erin," I said softly without opening my eyes.

"Aye." She was right in front of me. I opened my eyes and her strangely beautiful elven face filled my vision, she was so close.

"I need you to do that thing you can do." I didn't move away from her, "Will you delve?"

She nodded. I could feel her anticipation, curiosity, and bit of understanding beyond my current grasp. Then she put her forehead to mine and I closed

my eyes.

"Think of it," she said, "Focus on it." I narrowed myself to the smell of it. It smelled like the boudoir.

"Go to that hazy image you saw with me. See Quinn above you."

I could see it, the memory of Quinn so strange and I could smell the 1920's smell of the underground room.

*I can taste the blood on my tongue, but I can't move. My arms feel so heavy, but I so want to reach up and caress the face above me. I can feel every vein and artery in my body suddenly, like a warm rush through my whole being. Like quicksilver. I can feel the inside of my mouth changing, though I can't move my tongue to explore it and I can feel my body digesting itself, transforming into something else. It hurts, but I can't get away from it. I can't even tense my muscles against it. I can only feel it. Only experience it.*

*Suddenly I take a deep breath and I am free again for the first time. The haze is gone and so is Quinn, but the world is too fascinating to worry about that just yet. There is all of time and time is nothing. The glow of the lamp on the table is like a physical object and I can feel where the sun is on the other side of the world and how fast it is moving. I can feel the bar above us and the people in it and above them the clouds moving from the ocean wind created by the tide and the earth being misshapen by the moon's gravity, high and far away. I can feel the other planets and the stars moving and pulling and pushing while all these people and creatures and plants crawl and climb over a chunk of rock captured by the star. I can feel the ebb and flow of all these elements in the space of a heartbeat and then it is stillness.*

*I am outside of time and I can see it the way I can see the marble inlaid in the coffee table in front of me. I can see the flow of what must have come before to*



make this stone look like this: The fusing of the different stones, the paths created by tiny channels of water carrying minuscule amounts of minerals to deposit. I can see the water digging deeper channels and small networks and depositing a second mineral until the marble was marble and it was dug out of the ground and shaped and became a table. In the same way, I can see all of time and space, what came before and how it altered paths and shifted, and what is now and where all of right now connects to what was. I can see the future, so many futures. From the line of right now, it split and branched and was a hundred paths, just like the marble.

In all of that humongous universe, I can see my life like a tiny golden thread. As I focus on it, my perspective reorients and I am only seeing that one thread. I see all the little lines and all the events and all the people going back hundreds of years that tied me to this moment. I look at the lines of the future and I can see the pivot points, the paths through the maze and where they lead. I see my deaths and I see my lives.

Sitting up, I know what I have to do next. Quinn is there, beside me. Like a mask overlay, I can see his face from the past and his different faces from the future when I look at him. He smiles at me and puts on the marble table an old drink napkin, fabric with black lace around it. It is a thing of the boudoir and with it know this place and know it as a place where things have happened and a place where things will happen. At the corner, he places a wine glass. He casually draws a knife across his wrist and lets the blood drop into the glass, filling it a third before the wound closes like magic. He looks back up at me and is holding a pen out. In that pen, I feel my awareness of the past and the future fully focus me on this moment as I reach for the pen, take it, and slip down off the

*lounge to sit on the floor at the coffee table.*

*I take a sip of the blood wine and it heightens everything, solidifies everything.*

*From inside, I watch the words form on the paper. I am aware of my future self inside and read the words out loud. As I read them out, I can feel Erin's forehead against mine and I can feel the future-self as she, as we, as I speak the words out loud.*

*"Open when you remember him,  
The Shadow that brings you the moon.  
Read when you recall that night,  
The needle brought knowing so very soon.*

*sun and brother wait for you  
With he that hydes all fears;  
heard your howls in silent night  
With she that Death holds dear.*

*He waited, o child, and hopeful he read,  
That what he gave you would take:  
The screams and souls of twisted web  
in the gift of being Awake.*

*Once and twice and thrice must see,  
The garden's twisted soul.  
Bad wolves have caves, when demon's run,  
the memory needs be in shadows foal.*

*The pen runs dry, blood runs hot  
and vision gives way to Thirst,  
These must be heard and known and seen  
Before the fated First.*

*Time is short and nights are long  
and the lines will all converge,  
Shadow must silence all of this  
Til the memories emerge.*

*She saw me in hell in the final fight.  
The seer visioned me in this same room.  
See and hear and smell the truth:  
Love's light leave hates fright in his doom.*

*Hide away, the guides reveal  
The sun's blood will leash in  
Tied to echo's cry across the filter  
I am the one named Titian.*

I pulled myself out of the memory. This was the end of the time that me of that night and me of this night shared. I opened my eyes and Erin was inches away staring at me, agape. I looked around the room.

Quinn hadn't moved. He stood silent, a shadow smile on his lips. Crae held the napkin out of the envelope. It was as I remembered it, black lace and white napkin. I could see where the ink had bled through the back. He kept reading it over, eyes a blur, then looking over it at me.

I looked back at Erin, she was away from me near the edge of the light, peeking up from a crouch. The boys were very closed, but Erin was completely stunned and open.

"Howls in the silent night." She said looking at me and she remembered the bridge, remembered me transmitting all of myself to the world at large.

"The Shadow." Crae said, looking at the napkin, then at Quinn.

Quinn nodded. "Myself, after that night. I became a

shadow." He said to Crae and looked at me.

"Does everyone....have that experience?" I asked.

"Some remember it better than others." Quinn answered.

"Never have I heard something the likes of this." Erin said.

"All the lines will converge." Crae read from the napkin.

"I know who is hyde." Erin jumped up from the ground. "Hyde is Vex. I know and tis true that I call him that to my own self for how he gives over to the Thirst."

"Hyde's his fears." Quinn quoted under his breath.

"You memorized it?" I asked him.

"Them." He replied, "I memorized them."

I was taken aback. That he had liked them, found them interesting, found them relevant: I knew. That he kept my words in his mind, bouncing around inside him, made me feel warm and connected to him in a new and wonderful way.

The feeling spilled through the cracks in his door, opening him and opening my own words back to me. I heard them echo in my mind again, here and now - with Adam fresh in my mind, with Ella's prophesy floating in my brain and Vex captured and held - I heard all of the napkins again, read again and again in Quinn's voice and I heard the road map in it.

"We have to go to them." I told them all, "We have to go and get Vex." I looked at each of them in turn and knew that it would only work if we all went to that house in Queen Anne.

"The house is guarded, but not heavily." Quinn took the floor, "Society vampires travel in flocks from house to house. Only a few stay in Seattle year round, and most of them do not stay in the Society House, they have their own accommodations." He reached into his inside jacket pocket and pulled out a folded paper.

"This is what I have managed to map out. It is a big house. Bigger than it looks, with a lot of small rooms and halls all through it."

He put it down on the table in the center of the room. What there was was detailed, but there were huge chunks missing. The house was three floors tall. On the hand drawn map, about half of the second floor and a full quarter of the first were blank spaces.

"Adam's office is somewhere in this section." He pointed at the missing half of the second floor.

"Oh, fuck. No." Crae cried suddenly, putting a hand to his head and then to his mouth as realization hit him. "Adam is the Sun." It was a statement and a question. Quinn looked at him, and nodded.

"You know the Societies." Quinn said. That was a statement.

"Adam brought me to the moon." Crae replied.

"Wow." I breathed, "Twisted web."

"When?" Quinn asked Crae.

"1862. Reno." Crae responded, "That is when I was indentured. I don't really know how long I was with them before the Lost Night. All the places and horrors run together. Adam recruited Vex a few years later. Maybe 1867?"

Quinn nodded. "Was he still in Memphis?"

"Yeah." Crae affirmed.

"That is a great city for the dark." Quinn said lightly, as a matter of fact and aside.

Crae smiled, showing his little vampire points. "Yeah, it is."

The momentary lightness between the boys rolled around the room. I felt Erin relax beside me and realized that she had been wound up like a tight coil. With that breath, the moment was over and Crae was back to business.

"Adam used Vex as a weapon. Back then, he couldn't even remember what happened when the Thirst took over.

Between times, he read every book he could get to. Adam thought he was 'fascinating'. He kept him on these long chain manacles in his office, opposite his desk.

"After a few decades, Vex started remembering bits and pieces and he wanted to get out. Escape. He was like a beast in a cage, which was just about how I felt about the Society and Adam in particular. I managed to get Vex the key to his bonds. When the Thirst took him, he released himself from the chains and he just flew at Adam. I don't have words to describe the fury. He mauled him to the ground and tore off his foot. Then he sucked him dry from the stump. When he came to himself, he knew what he had done. He remembered every night starting with the first all at once. He remembered all of it and we just fucking ran."

"But what does it mean that Adam is the Sun?" Erin broke in, exasperatedly.

"Oh! Right." Crae exclaimed, "It's the highest position in the Society. When we were with them, Adam wasn't the Sun. That means either the old Sun walked into the actual Sun or -"

"-Adam killed him." Quinn finished the sentence. "He has completely transformed the Society. He has his protege, his fount, and four guards with him at the house. Outside he almost always travels with at least two."

"How many could he command?" I asked, understanding that "highest position in the Society" meant guy-in-charge and Quinn had spoken of full-time Society Vampires who lived around Seattle.

"Maybe thirty in the city." Quinn looked at Crae for confirmation.

"30-ish," he confirmed.

"Walk into the Sun." I quoted from one of the napkins. I looked around at the stunned eyes staring at me.

"And the fire consumes passes once and twice, and

third the fire booms." Quinn finished the line.

"I am the fire." I told them. "I have always referred to myself as fire in my poems." I shrugged as they all looked at me. "The hair." Shrug.

"There's another place where it says one, two, three." Erin interjected.

"Uh..." Crae hunted through the words on the fabric napkin.

"Once and twice and thrice must see, the garden's twisted soul. Bad wolves have caves, when demon's run, the memory need be in the shadows foal."

"Garden's twisted soul." Crae said. "Adam." Pause. "Cute."

I quirked a half smile, but I was deeper than the words at that moment. It was almost like I could connect those words with a little glimpse of the future lines again. "I don't think we can finish this tonight." I told Quinn. "This is the night we get back Vex. I don't think this is the night we settle with Adam."

His eyes were hard looking at mine. He nodded once.

"There will be another night." He said, simply.

"I suspect two." I replied.

"So," Erin cut between us, "are we going to storm the castle? It's our four to their seven plus Vex."

I could feel the Thirst, still below the surface but ever present. It was not satisfied and that meant that I could use it.

Quinn looked at Crae and Erin, then said to me, "Wood in the heart will kill. Decapitation. Fire seriously damages."

"Adam looks to immobilize, rather than kill." Crae added, looking from me to Erin. "He likes the long game of inflicting pain and doesn't mind pain himself."

"Has anyone ever tried a stun gun on a vampire?" I asked the group at large.

"Yeah." The voice came from behind me, in the

tunnel. Wrath walked out unabashedly from the darkness, the light catching on the rough ends of his mohawk. "I met this young lady vampire in Alaska that was into some pretty...unique experiences. She wanted someone to shoot her with a stun gun, so I helped her out." He shrugged and smiled at the memory, "It has pretty much the same immediate effect on a vampire as a human. It takes us humans about twice as long to recover."

Crae nodded. "I'll go shopping. There is a place nearby."

"Do you need money?" I asked him. Not waiting for the answer, I walked over to the bag and tossed him a ribbon wrapped set of bills. "Get me a long coat." I said as I walked over to grab the napkin. The napkin and everything else went back into my bag and I took it over to Wrath. I opened myself to him in that guarded way we had shared earlier.

"I need you to take this. If I don't come for it in a week, use the money and find who it goes to. It goes to someone." I didn't know who that someone might be, but I knew he would get it to them. An echo of the lines of the future.

"I will take care of it." He said simply, and took the bag from me. I trusted him with everything.

"Do you want me again, before you go?" He asked, offering his blood freely, "Would it help?"

Quinn was suddenly behind me, his hands on my hips and his voice whispering in my ear. "Take what's offered. It will give you a wider line to walk later. The Thirst only cares about the blood, it won't care about saving Vex. You can't let it get too strong."

I nodded.

Wrath addressed the man behind me. "And you?"

"Are you offering?" Quinn asked him, still standing at my back.

"I am. I don't have a lot left to give, but Aleese



will take care of me if I can stay here."

"Stay." Erin yelled, casually. It wasn't the first time he had stayed at the lair, clearly.

"Why?" Quinn asked, an appraising sense to the question.

"Beyond the experience of sharing a little death with two beautiful creatures such as you and Titian, and beyond the fact that I like Vex, I have my own grudge with Adam." His face turned dark with remembering and it was like a different person. I could begin to see why he was called Wrath. "This will be a start to settling with him."

"One hour." Crae yelled to the room at large, climbing the ladder out. "I'll be back in an hour."

I looked around at him and noticed Erin crouched against the wall, staring at the flames from the candles on the table in the center of the room. There were still some answers I needed.

Turning back to the boys, I said, "Can you give me a moment, first?" Wrath shrugged. Quinn looked from me to Erin and back to me, then nodded once. He and Wrath walked together into the darkness toward the other room leaving me alone with the crazy little vampire.

I walked over to her and sat against the wall beside her. She never looked away from the flame.

"Erin, I need to know. This....poem...." I stopped to try to shape the question.

"I have never heard of such a thing." She answered without turning and her voice sounded far away. "Not the prophesy. Most Awake with the world suddenly in their mind, whole and complete and speak what seems most important, the Waking Vision. More than a few have written their guide or even painted. Your words are beautiful, and 'tis truth, that." She turned on her toes, still crouched, and was suddenly facing me fully and frankly.

"The memory. I've never heard of anyone having a memory of the Waking Vision. Not ever." Her eyes watched me intently, as though searching for the answer. "I can still see it, the whole path whenever I think about your poem words." She looked on the verge of tears.

"I can't." I said, with realization, "Not really. It is like I saw a map once and when we hit a fork, I suddenly know which way to go, but I can't tell you why or what the road is called. But that feeling of being connected to the whole universe...." I sighed with the memory of the memory. "I think it was what I was looking for all the time."

Erin smiled at me and leaned in to kiss me on the forehead. "You are amazing, Titian. Just bloody fucking amazing at every turn." Her kiss got the Thirst's attention and it swelled through me. I held it inside myself, apart from Erin because she wasn't on the menu.

"If I start to take a wrong turn, you'll tell me?" I asked her.

"Aye, and you can put money on that, lass. But now, your boys are waiting for you." She winked at me.

## Chapter 7



### Prelude to Battle

The room was empty except for vampire and the boy. They were sitting on the couch. As I walked in I could hear Wrath saying, "...purely the danger that makes it fun, but without the danger it wouldn't be the same experience. You know?"

"I do indeed." Quinn said to him before turning to me.

"What are you boys talking about?" I asked.

"Gold mining in Alaska." Wrath replied matter-of-factly, before smiling with invitation me to join them. With the two of them sitting on the couch it felt odd to join them, so I pulled an ottoman from the side of the couch and sat facing them instead.

I realized that I was closed and appraising. Maybe it was just a sort of shell shock. I had taken in so much in so short a time that I wanted to be alone in my own self. Or maybe it was the strangeness of the situation right in front of me.

Quinn broke the silence: "I can see you have already fed some tonight."

"From Wrath." I said.

"You already gave tonight?" Quinn asked surprised, "And you want to go again?"

Wrath shrugged, casually, "There is need and there is desire. She only took not even a pint and Aleese will look after me for a few days. She's done it before and," he grinned, "she makes excellent chicken soup."

Quinn smiled back at him and they shared a moment of camaraderie before they looked over to me.

"I think it might be best if you feed from Wrath and I feed from you. I haven't fed the Thirst at all

tonight. I wasn't expecting you to call me from halfway across the city to mount a rescue mission so early."

His teasing took the edge off the whole situation. I felt myself opening to him. I looked over at Wrath. He was watching us and I could feel him, open and neutral, like when we met only a few hours ago. I could feel the edge of danger about him and his excitement for this encounter, just below the surface.

I let that excitement trickle into myself, and trickle down to the Thirst. It was like a snake and it snapped at the trickle. I soothed it and I tamed it with the promise of blood.

"Come, sit here." Quinn's words were soft, but his dark eyes commanded as he held out his hand to me. I took it as I rose from the ottoman and he brought me to sit between them. He kept my hand in his and brought my wrist slowly to his face.

I felt his desire, inhaling the scent of my flesh and the blood coursing under it. His tongue flicked out to taste the salt taste of my skin and his eyes held me. Held us. I could feel him including Wrath in his gaze and in his desire.

With Quinn still holding the wrist nearest him, I turned to Wrath. I could feel the desires of the two boys swirling around each other with buffeting and buffeted in the center. I let my own desires burn in the eye of the storm. With my free hand, I brought Wrath's face to mine and kissed him gently, almost chastely. I pulled back from him enough to focus on his eyes.

"I want your wrist." I said and I could see the veins squirting in my mind's eye.

"My safe word is 'stop.'" He replied offering his wrist to me.

I took what was offered and turned back to face Quinn, bringing my whole body around and Wrath scooted

in behind me until I was leaning on his chest. I tossed my legs over Quinn's, sinking into Wrath as he held me tight to him, his wrist in my hands and mine in Quinn's. I rubbed my hand up his arm, feeling the hard muscles underneath and feeling Quinn doing the same to my arm. I took Wrath's wrist firmly in my grasp and brought it up to my mouth. He stayed passive, letting my movement direct him, but I could feel his heart speed up and his breathing grew heavier as I nibbled the skin gently with my front teeth. I opened my eyes and watched Quinn watching me as he did the same to my wrist, the one he held captive. I watched and felt and as one we opened our mouths wide and sank our sharp sharp teeth into flesh.

The pain in my wrist was incredible. I could feel his teeth, two needles piercing and pushing aside flesh into the vein. Wrath took a sharp breath and then relaxed as he exhaled, sinking to the same sensation in his own wrist. I held him tight and still with inhuman strength as I pulled my teeth out, feeling the teeth pulling out of my own flesh as I watched.

The blood spurted to hit the roof of my mouth and it was Christmas morning shining and sparkling with hot cinnamon cider and presents. Wrath bit my ear, enough to bring blood and it closed the loop somehow. Suddenly all of our elation and joy and plenty and pleasure mixed together and melded together. It was beyond feeding the Thirst, we were feeding each other. Physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally were feeding from each other and of each other and the Thirst was so small compared to that.

I sucked on the wound I had made in Wrath as I felt my own wrist closing up. The sharp pain of my suckling jabbed into the balloon we were riding. Wrath took a deep breath, inhaling the scent of my hair with the pain. He held his breath for a long moment and then whispered, "Stop."

I bit my tongue before the Thirst could rise and protest. I licked my lips and kissed the closed wound, then brought his arm back down around my torso. Through all of it, Quinn and I had held eyes and I could feel a kind of triumph in him. This was, somehow, all that he had hoped. I realized as we lay in this wonderful post feeding openness that it scared him. Last time everything was just as he had hoped, it had gone so wrong. So amazingly and truly beyond fucking wrong.

I sat up and pulled him to me. When our faces were nearly touching, I told him simply, "I am Titian." It was like applying salve to a burn, I could feel the words sooth him, invigorate him for the task ahead. I was suddenly kissing him. It was not a soft gentle kiss, but a kiss between predators, between warriors. It was fierce and bracing. I broke the kiss and looked at him. His eyes were hard and focused. He was ready.

Wrath was laying back on the couch and looked unconscious. I rolled off the couch and next to him.

"Wrath?" I said softly near his ear.

"ummmhmm." He mumbled.

"Thanks." I said. He smiled a little, without opening his eyes. I bit my tongue again and used a hand to turn his face toward mine so I could kiss him. I could feel his lethargic enjoyment as I brought my tongue between his lips. His lips parted and our mouths explored each other. When my tongue stopped bleeding, I broke the kiss and pulled back from him. He sighed, contentedly. I got up, realizing comfortingly that he still had the strap of my backpack clenched in his hand.

I turned to Quinn and he was watching me from the doorway.

"What did you do?" He asked.

"I fed him a little blood." I replied.

"You....what?!" Quinn asked, his eyes wide and

incredulous.

"Just a little. It will help his body heal faster."

Quinn started to respond, then stopped. He started again, but seemed not to know what to say. Finally, he said, "Crae should be back any minute."

A shout echoed down the hall, "Oi!"

"Sounds like his is back now." I grinned at the dark vampire. I was ready to go get Vex.



Crae was standing talking Aleese near the bottom of the ladder. Erin was still crouched near the wall.

"...I can help." Aleese was saying.

"Aleese, I promise I will." Crae responded, "but tonight is not the night. Only a very few are even conscious after and you wouldn't have any training. Adam is horrible and terrifying and he has centuries of training." Crae kissed her on the forehead. "I can't. I won't"

Aleese pouted. She was worried for Crae.

"Aleese," I said, "Wrath needs your help. He gave to his limit. He said you had nursed him before."

"I need you to help him," Crae told her, "Wrath is valuable to me. Another night I will bring you to the moon, I promise, and I will show you all the beauty of being Awake."

"Make it back." Aleese demanded, seriously and angrily. She grabbed him by the hair and kissed him fiercely and fully. "Don't die." It was like a blessing she gave him, still holding him by the hair. Then she stormed off toward Wrath.

Crae stood stunned for a long moment before taking a big breath and turning to our staring faces with a grin.

"Presents!" He said, holding up a packed backpack.

"Gather around, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, vampires of all age." He grabbed beanbags and piled them up to make an unconventional throne. As he bantered, Erin crept out of her corner and we all gathered around as he sat and unzipped the backpack on his lap.

"Tasers." He said, handing around a taser gun apiece complete with belt holster for each of us. "They shoot out wired projectiles and start shocking as soon as they hit. Keep pulling the trigger and it keeps jolting. These are one use only, so use them and lose them."

I didn't have a belt so I just hung onto the taser after I inspected it. Crae reached back into the backpack and produced knives, also complete with holsters. The holster also held three small wooden stakes on the outside. I thought that maybe it had originally held throwing knives.

"Your special touch?" I asked Crae pulling on out, it was hard wood and sharp.

Crae gave his grin. "Hand made of genuine graveyard wood."

The knife was no decorative piece, it was a solid chunk of steel, razor sharp and serrated from half way down the blade to the guard. Inlaid on either side of the blood groove were rivulets of wood.

"Titian." Crae said, drawing my attention from the weapon. He handed me the coat I had requested, wrapped into a bundle with a leather belt.

"Thanks." I said, sliding the holsters onto the belt and wrapping it tightly around me above the hips. The coat fit me perfectly. Matte black leather covered the bright white of my shirt. At my thighs, the seams split, so six wide panels swung around my legs. I practiced swinging the coat back to grab out the taser and knife, I rearranged the positions of the holsters for maximum speed. I felt like an action figure.



*I'm not really a prophesied vampire hero, but I play one on the TV.*

I looked around. Quinn was doing the same thing I had been, but with his own belt and the coat he had come with. Erin still had her new weapons in her hands.

"I need to go get things. Prepare." The crazy little vampire said, staring at the weapons in her hands.

"In a few minutes." Crae told her. She nodded. He turned back to the bag in his lap, which was deflated, nearly empty. He pulled out a holstered handgun, sleek and dead black.

"It has incendiary rounds. I can get off three good shots in a row, or the clip of six if the gun has time to cool between, but it is loud." He said, as he rigged it to hang under his arm.

"That will be a last resort, then." Quinn said, going over to look at his hand drawn map of the house. We all circled around it, too.

"Since this is a rescue mission, we need to get in and out without drawing attention to ourselves as much as we can. The best point of entry is here, he put a finger down on the third floor balcony. "It opens into a big training room and they leave the windows and doors open for the breeze. Each individual room in any Society House is mostly soundproof. The downside of going in here is that anyone training will have weapons on hand."

"An' for truth, they will already be worked up and raring for a fight, if'n they be training proper." Erin interjected.

"We need to use the tasers, to try to keep them from raising an alarm." He looked around at us and we nodded agreeing and understanding. "Most likely Adam will be with Vex here." He pointed at the blank area on the second floor. "If we are lucky, we won't meet

anyone until we find them, but worst case we could meet Adam's personal security vampires. There are also the house security vampires, whatever entourage is hanging around, and the human servants that attend to the house. We need to keep the fighting as quiet as we can and be sure that we are closed to them. Adam is very sensitive."

"Adam is like a fucking satellite dish." Crae informed us, "The slightest crack in our empathy will be like setting off an alarm."

"We are going to have to face Adam." I told them, knowing it as fact, "We can't get Vex without facing him. But I agree, let's surprise the bastard if we can."

"Ready to storm the castle?" Crae asked the group at large. Quinn nodded resolutely, refolding the ground plan and putting it in his coat.

Erin shook her head.

"I have to get some things to make the best of this battle." She said. "I'll meet you outside." She said, and she was gone with a slamming of the door.

"Something is going on with her." Crae said to me, looking at where she had been. He turned to me and shrugged, "Or maybe she is just crazy." I didn't say anything, but I thought something was going on with her my own self. It felt like I knew what it was, like deja vu on the tip of my tongue, but I couldn't quite grasp it. I shook my head to clear it.

"I need to find a phone." I realized suddenly in the silence. Crae dug into his pocket and tossed a small flip phone to me. It looked like it had seen some better days, but the screen wasn't cracked. I nodded my thanks to Crae and went, human slow up the ladder and to the doorway standing open from Erin's exit. As I was leaving I heard Crae asking Quinn, casually: "So that map. You just had it on you."

"Serendipity, my friend." Quinn's response, "And

the fact that I was planning to try to add to it tonight."

"I think you will." Crae's response floated to me as the door closed behind me. I dialed the number I knew by heart.

*I wonder what time it is.* I thought as the phone rang and rang.

"Hello?" My father's voice was coated in sleep.

"Hi, dad. It's me."

"Hey, baby." He sounded suddenly less asleep. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah, dad. I'm okay." I kept my voice low and even, separate from my longing for home and innocence. Dad couldn't solve my problems for me now, but hearing his voice made me wish, just for a second, that I could wake up from this strange dream. "I miss you, dad." I said.

"We miss you, too, baby. You're brother is playing a big regional lacrosse game next week in Tacoma. He would be tickled if you came."

"I don't think I can, dad. I am traveling." I would be after we got Vex back, anyway. We couldn't sit here like ducks.

"What's wrong, baby? I know something isn't right. I can hear it in your voice. Tell me." I wanted to tell him everything, but I couldn't. Not tonight, not like this.

"I'll tell you the whole tale another night, dad. Honest as a Texas sundown. A friend is in trouble and I have to help him."

"A friend. Are you in danger? No. Don't answer that. You have to do what you have to do. But, baby? Take care of yourself."

"I will, dad. I love you."

"I love you, too."

I closed the phone. A tear ran down my cheek, then another down the other. I took a deep, calming breath

with my eyes shut and released it slowly. I opened my eyes. Erin was standing right in front of me, looking at me.

"Do you know?" She asked, whispering, eyes intense and searching.

"Do I know what?" I asked. She did not answer, she just kept studying me with her eyes. The moment was broken by the boys coming out of the pyramid. I turned to them, then back to Erin. She didn't say anything, so I turned back to Crae and tossed him the phone.

"Make sure it is on silent." I advised him. He fiddled with the tech as we trooped out into the cemetery.

"Can you fly?" Quinn asked Crae. The boy shook his head. Quinn looked at Erin, who shrugged a sort-of.

"I can carry her." I told him. "I will follow you. I don't want to end up in Kent again." Quinn smiled his dark velvety smile at me. I held my hand out to Erin and drew her into my embrace. Crae walked behind Quinn and wrapped both arms around his waist.

"Go." I told Quinn. I opened to him and felt him open to me. I knew his intent as he raised off the ground and I piggybacked on his intent. I raised off the ground just after him, feeling Erin tighten her hold around me.

Secure that I was following his lead, Quinn bolted south and I was on his heels. As we flew through the night, I could feel Quinn establish his connection to Crae. I tightened my hold on Erin and put my face in her whipping hair, inhaling the windy scent of her. I opened myself to her, realizing as I did that I had fallen a little bit in love with this insane vampire girl. She opened to my love and through me she was connected to Quinn and Crae. We were an exclusive club, a private chat room, closed to all but each other.

As we soared over the city, I realized I needed to

make a stop. I could see the shop in the University District in my mind. Just like that, I was leading the group-mind, giving turn-by-turn directions.

It is like magic, coming to land from flying. I imagined us standing in front of the store as we glided over the building and we just were. I can't imagine what it looks like to someone paying attention on the streets. I wondered if I had ever seen a vampire land and had chalked it up to observational malfunction, continuing on without registering the oddness of the world I was living in.

The girl with the purple hair and the lollipop was behind the counter again and her jaw dropped when we walked in, the lollipop stuck on her tongue. In the mirror behind her I caught sight of us, en masse.

We looked intimidating, but not like an army. Our individual flairs popped out and made us a collective. A very pale collective.

"I need those boots." I told the girl. She took the stick to her lollipop and licked her the candy before she closed her mouth, finally. I opened myself and us to her, just a trickle. I wanted the boots, and I wanted them because they were functional and they would kick ass. My desire tinged with the violence of the night and she licked her lollipop.

"Apparently." She raised an eyebrow, resting her chin in her hand, elbow on the counter. Something about her was irresistibly sexy. Thirst climbed the lust like a beanstalk. She breathed in deeply and I could feel the breath as though it were in my own lungs. The air between us seemed alive and vibrating.

"Yes." She breathed. I walked slowly until I was pressed against the counter between us. I leaned closer and I licked the lollipop in her hand and I whispered, "Get the boots."

She blinked and stood up. She went in the back and came back with the boots. She dropped them on the

counter with the laces still tangled in her slim hand. She smiled at me, coy and playful.

I grabbed onto the laces, watching her eyes as I pulled her arm toward me. I twisted the laces, to better control her arm and bit her wrist like a viper striking. The sudden pain drew a little scream from her. She pulled on the laces, but couldn't move the arm. Just as quick I pulled out my teeth, drinking and lapping up the squirting blood. I watched her face as she stopped fighting the pain and it stopped being pain.

"Yes." She whispered, her eyes closed.

I could feel Crae and Quinn and Erin, all experiencing the same flow of sensations as I was. Through my link with the girl, I could feel the sensations spreading from the epicenter at her wrist. I could feel every vein in her body, every artery, every capillary. The rivers and creeks of her human body bringing nutrition and life. The Thirst was like a passive observer, rolling in the blood smell and taste and saltiness.

*Stop.*

I couldn't tell whose thought it was, but I obeyed it. I bit my tongue and let the healing elixir drip onto her wrist. I loosened my hold on the boots and her arm fell gently to the counter and she stood straight with her eyes still closed.

We waited.

She suddenly let out a big breath shaking out her hair and relaxing. She breathed in and let out a small contented sort of moan. Finally, she turned back to us - to me - and she had a smile on her lips before her eyes finally opened. She smiled wider as she looked in my eyes, and she winked.

"Crae," I said, without turning, "would you pay her. For the boots." Crae laid \$200 on the counter and led the group out the door.

"Hey," she yelled to me before I got outside, "Come back when you want another...piece." The double entendre followed me out the door.



I sat down on the sidewalk outside the shop to change my shoes. I was lacing up the second boot before I realized I did not have any way to carry the converse sneakers, short of tying the laces together and slinging them over my shoulder. I didn't look at my assembled compadres as I stood up and went back in the store, spoiling a good exit.

"You really take a gal at her word, don't you?" The lollipop girl said. I blushed a little.

"I realized that I don't have a way to carry my sneakers." I said, sheepishly, "and it wouldn't do to have them...bouncing around."

"You can leave them here on one condition." She said, seriously, waiting for me to raise an eyebrow in acknowledgement before continuing, "I get to play dress up with you again when you come back for them."

I wordlessly handed them over to her and pulled a bill from my corset. "Call this a down payment on whatever you have in mind." I told her and handed over Benjamin.

She smiled at me with evil visions dancing in her eyes and the shop door bell rang, interrupting the moment. I turned to go and leave her to her customer, but it was Erin standing in the door.

"Leave us." She said simply to the girl. She stared agape at the vampire for a moment, but something in Erin's determined face convinced her. She turned and walked through the door into the back room, leaving us alone.

Erin walked slowly until she was right in front of me, looking up at me. She was not the strange, light

girl I had met two nights ago. No. Something in her eyes was different, fierce, as she delved into my eyes seeking my soul.

"I do not have time to share with you all I would have you know." She said, "but this ,I will have." She opened her hunger to me and it was a raging, drunk beast of a thing. I could feel her fighting it and it fighting her almost like a physical battle.

"I have not fed this night." She said "and I would have your life to battle for."

Her words were strange in my ears, but her meaning was clear in my mind: She wanted all of my tale, my life story, just as Janie on the bridge had given me her life story.

"We can't. You'll drain me." I whispered back. I was tempted to step into her embrace, but I couldn't let Vex down. I couldn't let Ella down.

"Shhh." She said, stepping closer still, "I needn't drain you to know your tale, but do not fight me."

She was quicker than lightning going from cloud to cloud. If I had been human, I would not have ever felt her teeth. I stilled my instinctive reaction to throw her off and felt her take hold of my mind as she took my blood into herself.

My life literally flashed before my eyes. Starting with my earliest childhood memories, through random recollections from grade school. Making paper with my mother on a hot summer day and building models of Star Trek ships with my dad. Playing backyard basketball with my brother, Max. The time my sister, Allie, and I stayed up all night playing Rummy and talking when we were both on the cusp of adolescence. The horrors and triumphs of high school. The first day of college and the opening of my mind over the past three years. The Lost Night until this very moment, with this crazy and beloved girl drinking my life with my blood.

I willed the wound to close and it did. I realized



as she kissed my healed neck that there were tears running down my face.

Erin pulled back and looked up at me.

"That is what a life is supposed to be like." She said, kissed me, and walked out the door. Leaving me in absolute confusion and wonderment.



Outside, Erin was standing with Quinn. He looked at me and, with just that one glance, we were melded again. One mind.

"Changing up the flight manifest." Crae said. He looked to his feet, kicking them on the ground like a sheepish 6 year old. "Will you teach me to fly?"

"Now?" I asked, incredulous. On the way to confront the worst and scariest vampire any of us had ever heard of seemed like a bad time for a flying lesson. He looked up at me with a terrified glaze to his eyes.

"I don't want to actually fly there!" He clarified, "Just, can you be aware of how it is you are doing it and share it with me? Like an in-flight lesson."

"Oh!" It was a realization that everyone did not just run down the road and hop into the air as soon as they had vampire powers. "Yeah." I smiled. He came around behind me and put his arms over my shoulders, the way you would carry a child on your back.

"This way is easier." He whispered into my ear.

I turned enough for him to see my raised eyebrow as Quinn's voice echoed in my mind.

*Stay with me. We land on the balcony.*

I nodded to him as he pulled Erin into him and then I focused back on Crae.

It seemed like a million years ago that I had needed to run down the road to escape from gravity. Now, I simply envisioned going up and I rose up into

the air with Crae on my back. I felt him tighten his hold on me as we shot above the buildings, felt the weight of him.

*Imagine yourself light as a feather.* I thought at him, my course on autopilot via Quinn. He might as well get that flying lesson. I could see the images he threw up at me, and they were interspersed with him falling like a rock.

"Right now!" I yelled out loud and in my mind. "Be in right now. This isn't a concept, it isn't an idea. Just make it so. Be light as a fucking feather!"

Suddenly, it clicked. His weight was gone. He was like a balloon tied to me.

Ahead. Quinn's voice floated through my head as he descended at full speed. The big third floor balcony was unique of all the houses I could see. I followed Quinn without hesitation and we were suddenly standing on the balcony, near the wall to keep from being seen by the people inside. Crae floated beside me for a moment, before he figured out how to come back to terra firma, as it were.

From the open windows, I could hear sounds of fighting and training room mockery.

"Look, there is no way you are going to be as fast as me. Ever. If you want to win a fight with a vampire, you have to use your fucking head, human. Anticipate where I am going to be."

"What does it matter?" The voice sounded like a young man, "My fist won't hurt you anyway."

"Just do it." The deeper voice said, threateningly. "If you aren't a candidate, you are food. Which do you want to be?" We heard a scuffling and the young human made a pain sound. Crae and Quinn unholstered their tasers in unison and looked at each other. I could hear them communicating with each other like they were far away:

3. 2. Now.

They were suddenly both in the open door to the training floor. I moved to watch through the window as the taser projectiles flew. Crae was spot on and his hit the vampire. He was a big man, muscled, and his skin was a deep purple black. Big or not, once the electricity hit him, he was on the ground stiff and twitching. Crae didn't let up the trigger.

Quinn's lines flew and hit only air. The human boy was hyper-aware from his training session with the vampire and he ran away from us for the hole in the floor, jumping with hands and feet on either side of the ladder going down.

"Shit." Quinn cursed under his breath. Crae finally let up on the shock going to the big vampire. We all walked into the big open room. The black man didn't move.

"So much for not raising an alarm." Erin said, ruefully. Boxes on the wall suddenly turned on with red light. There was no alarm, no whirling lights, no bars slamming down over the windows, just a red light every ten feet along the wall and the sound of running footsteps below us.

## Chapter 8



### The Society

Vex was chained to the wall, and the chains were not light, showy chains. *At least they only bound my wrists.* Vex told himself. *Just like the old days.*

He had kept up a steady conversation with himself since they had left him here, bound to the wall of the Sun's office. Of Adam's office. Vex tried not to think of that. He tried not to think of the Thirst.

He sat cross legged on the floor and told himself stories in his mind. The last time he was chained to Adam's wall he could not have done that: Tell himself stories. Back then, without a book to read, he would have been sitting here waiting for the Thirst to take command of him, but now he dreamed of what Crae and Erin were doing tonight. In his mind's eye he watched through the windows as Erin danced around her private graveyard haunt to Evanescence.

Adam was sitting at his desk now, paying no mind to Vex. He had paid him plenty of attention when he had come back from his hunt. He had brought his conquest back with him. He had pitied the poor girl as she came into this room willingly, knowing what was in store for her. Now she laid on the floor just out of Vex's range of motion, dying slowly in a pool of dark red hair and dark red blood.

Vex had thought it was Titian for one awful second when Adam had first walked in with the red haired girl. His mouth had run dry first thinking that Adam had captured her. His breath had caught the next moment, wondering if Titian had been an Agent for the Society all along. Then he realized that the girl was too young to be Titian, only perhaps 16 years old.

Adam had tricked her into walking willingly into Hell. Over the next few hours, he used her to make it Hell for Vex, too.

Vex had been resigned to the fact that the Thirst would take possession of him and destroy all the life in the girl. He had waited for the beast to surface, apologizing to her over and over. But it didn't happen. Adam had taunted him with the fresh blood in every way conceivable, but the Thirst stayed below.

After hours, when Adam started biting her over and over just for the sadistic pleasure of it, bite after vicious bite after bite up and down her legs, then Vex

nearly wished for the Thirst to take him so he could end her without anymore torture. But he knew Adam couldn't let that happen. He, Vex, would just become a ravenous beast on Adam's leash and the torture would not stop. If anything, it would be worse.

So he talked to himself. The king and Shahrazad in one.

"Security breach, my Lord Sun, third floor. " The voice on the intercom broke through Vex's stories like a different dream. He felt empty and wasn't sure if he could move anymore.

"Interesting." Adam said before thumbing the intercom button, "Details?"

"At least two male vampires with tasers. They got Toby. Sending the four man team up."

"Send the team up through the hole. And send two to the balcony." Adam released the button, closed his eyes for a moment and let out a long breath. Vex felt Adam's mind scan over him. Adam smiled and hit the button again, his eyes still closed.

"Jonathan, there are three of them. One is the redheaded girl. Bring her to me. Don't kill her."

"Yes, my Lord Sun."

"Yes, my Lord Sun what, Jonathan?" His words were clipped and sharp. The gulp from Jonathan was audible through the crackle of the intercom.

"Yes, my Lord Sun. We will not kill her."

Adam got up slowly and dragged his big chair behind him until he was just out of the reach of Vex's chains. He sat like a king and said, "Friends of yours?"

Vex hoped it was so and he hoped it was not. How could they dream that they could get in, get him, and get out? But he stayed, quiet and unmoving under Adam's question. He could feel the red-haired girl on the floor, only feet from him, still breathing raggedly, dying slowly and he thought of Titian.

*Could she do it? Could she get him out?*

She had bested Erin on her first night Awake, after all.

Adam followed his line of sight then turned back to study Vex. He broke into laughter unexpectedly. He roared with it and put his head, shaking in one hand before bringing the weight of his eyes and his mind back on Vex.

"I think that you know Titian." He said, leaning forward. "Tell me about her." He demanded. "Now." He started pounding on the closed door to Vex's

mind.



"Up in the training room." The voice floated from the hole in the floor.

"It is the only way up," I whispered recalling the map and gathering the others. "Erin, you and I will use tasers on the first two. Crae, be ready to take out the next one up. Hopefully the bodies will fall back down on them and it will slow them a bit."

Erin was watching the hole as I gave orders. With smooth grace, she unholstered her taser and hit a bald head as soon as it poked up through the hole. He fell to shouts from below. I thought maybe he had knocked the guy behind him off the ladder.

"Quinn," I hissed, as I watched the hole with my own taser out, "Get the windows." I did not want any of their vampires to come around that way and catch our backs. I could hear Quinn closing them as I focused on the square in the floor with the ladder sticking out of it.

Another bald head poked up through the opening.

"No!" Erin yelled, but too late. I had pulled the trigger and the wires were flying through the air before I realized that was the same bald head as before, with Erin's taser barbs still sticking out of the forehead and cheek. The body twitched and jerked with the electrical current my own taser sent through it, but it kept coming pushed up as a shield by those below. I looked at Crae and Erin. They positioned themselves on either side of the hole, ready to surprise whoever was puppeting the bald man. I pulled out one of the small stakes and the knife, hoping that the Society Security did not have a surprise of their

own planned.

Erin got down, belly first on the floor with a sharpened wooden stake in her own hand. She watched the hole like a cat, twitching her feet and butt as the unconscious bald man came up through the hole. A face suddenly popped up right in front of her, flying up through the space between the bald body and the edge of the hole. He was going so fast that he didn't notice the crazy little vampire until he was halfway up. He started raising a very small crossbow, but Erin was already striking. She hit him right in the heart and he screamed as he started burning, catching the bald man's clothes on fire. His scream was a wrenching horrible sound. I wondered if he was old or new, and if he was just too scared to leave the Society or if he was here by choice.

A grunt of pain from Crae brought me out of my pity party. The bald man was almost entirely through the hole now, and I could see he was being carried on the back of the human boy who had sounded the alarm. The boy had a leg over each shoulder and both the vampires hands in one of his own, to steady the body as they ascended. In his other hand, the boy had a small crossbow, identical to the one the now ashed vamp had carried. It looked like the glock handgun of crossbows. Crae was against the wall, picking a wooden bolt out of a smoldering wound on his thigh.

"I'm sorry." I said under my breath to the boy as I hurled the knife at his temple. I don't know if he heard me or if he sensed the attack coming, regardless, he turned toward me and the knife caught him right between the eyes and buried itself entirely into his skull. His head bounced back and then came to rest on a ladder rung, dead eyes staring at me as the body of the big bald vampire crashed to one side, where Erin had been.

"Crae! You okay?" I yelled to him as I ran over to

get my knife and the crossbow. He nodded wordlessly as he stood up. He moved to take a better position kneeling by the hole.

"Where is Erin?" I said to him. His eyes scanned the room quickly and he shrugged.

"Titian!" Quinn yelled, "Down!"

I hit the deck, feet toward the windows and head covered before I could think about it. Just in time. Two of the windows shattered, glass flying everywhere. I rolled over on my back. Two figures in matching black on black suits were flying in bringing up crossbows.

As if the shattering glass was a signal, the two bodies in the hole suddenly burst up into the air. In the confusion of bodies, three more security vampires flew up out of the hole in a tight back to back to back formation.

Everything was happening so fast, so all at once, and yet in slow motion. I started to aim my crossbow at the vampire flying at me from the window, but he suddenly let out a cry and crashed to the ground. He rolled, grabbing at his groin. I glimpsed Erin on the balcony with a slingshot, already reloaded with a sharpened little spike of wood. I scanned the room quickly. Quinn was fighting knife to knife with the other vampire that had come through the window. Crae had almost ripped the arm off the nearest vampire from the trio, crossbow and all. The second of the trio was facing away from the action, scanning the back of the room. The third was pulling the trigger of his weapon, aimed at me.

I was suddenly on my back on the ceiling. The wooden bolt had grazed my shoulder and it stung and didn't heal. It felt strange to have a wound again for the first time since I Awoke. In only three nights I had gotten mighty used to the healing.

The security vampire had followed me or spotted me and was bringing his bow up for another shot. My weapon



was already targeted on him. I fired for his heart.

The projectile bounced off of his black suit jacket like a nerf dart. He looked down at it, then back up at me with a smile and one eyebrow raised.

"Shit!" I yelled as I tucked in and rolled across the ceiling toward Crae. I heard the bolt hit the tile right next to me.

*They have armor!* I shouted to the others in my mind.

The trio broke formation. The one was still fighting Crae, his arm had started to heal back into place. The other two turned toward me, raising their damned crossbows.

*Unexpected.* The advice came from nowhere, from everywhere. *Be unexpected.*

I dove toward them, aiming at the newcomer as I flew, hitting him in the head with one of the slim wooden bolts. I dropped the gun and tightened my grip on the knife in my left hand as I pictured dive rolling onto the ground with the other vamps head rolling next to me. Like a time warp I was suddenly coming out of the roll and the head was continuing to roll by me. He didn't even look surprised.

"IIEEEEAAIIIII!!" Erin's battle cry echoed through the room as she flew spinning and twisting like a bullet through the air at the vampire Crae was fighting. She slashed significantly through his neck, but didn't decapitate him entirely. Crae gave him a solid kick and he fell down through the hole.

The one I had shot in the head had retreated to a corner, leaving his crossbow near the hole. He was trying to pull the bolt out of his head, screaming every time he touched it.

I moved my fastest to appear at Quinn's side as he and his opponent circled. They both looked a little rough, they had each gotten in hits. I felt Erin and Crae come up behind us, flanking.

"Run." I told the Society vampire.

He licked his lips as he looked at the four of us and around the room at his lack of comrades, then to the shattered windows: His escape. His face suddenly broke into a fang flashing grin and he turned back to us.

"No." He growled through fangs, " You run."

Suddenly there were at least a dozen more vampires landing quickly on the balcony and forming in the air almost invisible in their black on black suit except for white faces and hands.

"Enough." An authoritative voice came from behind us. I rolled around Quinn, back to back to face the voice.

Adam stood alone in the center of the big room. All the society soldiers behind me snapped to attention. Adam spoke softly, but his words reverberated through the room:

"They are here under my light until I give orders otherwise."

"We bow before the Sun." Came the unified response.

He looked slowly over the soldiers at attention and at the soldiers down and at the piles of ash. His eyes locked on the soldier in the corner, standing at attention with the crossbow bolt still impaled in his head.

"Come here and kneel." Adam ordered him. The soldier kept his face blank, but his body shook as he walked quickly and went to one knee in front of Adam. Adam grasped the bolt firmly and pulled it out with infinite slowness, watching my face the whole time, twisting the bolt until it came out with a pop audible even over the soldier's scream. He took a step past the soldier and pushed him onto his side with a casual gesture of his hand. The wounded vampire scrambled back to his corner and resumed standing at attention, blood rolling down his face. I never took my eyes from

Adam. He licked the blood from the bolt with one wide lick of his tongue and threw it to stick in the wall.

"Titian," He addressed me, finally. His eyes were light blue pools. "I can't tell you how intrigued I am to finally meet you." His voice held lust and pain and prophecy and promise of things unknown.

I just glared at him. I had nothing to say and no idea what to do. I could feel Quinn still at my back, facing the soldiers, but he was completely cut off from me.

"You are here for Vex, of course." Adam said, matter-factly, "He is in my office. My boy, Crae, can show you the way." He turned the weight of his attention to our tall vampire. I never glanced away from Adam; his beautiful face contorted demonic as he sucked in the fear and loathing radiating from Crae. It was like he was feeding on the emotions.

Go! I yelled to Crae in my mind. He started out of his hypnotic trance of hatred and led the way to the hole in floor.

If this was a trick, I realized following him with Quinn coming behind me, Crae could be chewed up coming down out of the hole. Quinn caught up to me as I walked by Adam. He still stood in the middle of the room like a GQ model with his pointed blond lock and his tailored suit.

Crae dove down into the hole head first and fast as a bunny. It dawned on me, the practical purpose of this crew's casual aerobatics: Training.

*It's clear.* His voice came in my mind. Quinn quickened his step to jump down before me. I looked back and Erin was walking backward toward me, not giving the soldiers or Adam her back. I turned back and simply stepped through the hole. Erin dropped down right after me, still facing away. She turned and smiled up at me. I couldn't help but smile back, even though I had no idea why the crazy

girl was smiling.

"I'm not his boy." Crae said.

I turned back to him. "We know." I responded simply.

"Follow me." Crae said, and his voice held anger and resignation at being assigned by Adam as our guide in this hated place.

"I thought you didn't know how to fly." I queried Erin as we walked down the long wide hallway.

She smiled up at me again. "O, an ye thought that wee flying lesson you gave was a private one, eh?"

*Oh. Huh.*

"Wait," I said, realizing, "That was your first time?" I was incredulous. "My first time, I ended up in Kent."

"I know." She replied with a crooked smile, reminding me that she knew everything now. She knew my whole life.

The hallway was of the long and straight variety with paneled walls, closed doors, a pressed-tin high ceiling, and antique looking lamp fixtures on the walls. After the first set of doors, Crae stopped and flew up to press the center of one of the pattern blocks on the ceiling. It went in with a click and two of the panels on the opposite wall swung in revealing another, thinner hallway with a door on either side and a door at the end.

Crae started to lead the way in, but I stopped him.

"I should go first." I told him. He nodded, looking more serious than I had ever seen him.

"Titian," Quinn said quietly, "Adam does not know that I am here."

"But, he must have seen you upstairs." I was confused. He shook his head, with a little grin. "There is a reason I am The Shadow. It will not work in the open, but as long as I am out of the way, he can not see me. Do not tip our hand. I will come out when

it will help the most." I nodded at him and he stepped in behind Crae, Erin brought up the rear again, leaving the hidden doors open.

"The door on the left leads to a meeting room that also opens out to the main hallway." Crae's voice came softly from my back. "The door on the right is Security. The one at the end is the Sun Room."

I walked right to the door at the end, flung it in hard enough hit the wall and walked in like I owned the place with my coat billowing behind me.

## Chapter 9



### The Sun

Titian locked eyes on Adam the second she walked into the room and never looked left or right. The desk was in the far left corner of the room, blocking it off from a cylindrical tower. Adam sat relaxed and reclined in a plush rolling office chair in the tower, his feet perched on the edge of the desk and his hands behind his head. He locked eyes with Titian and smirked at her.

Erin went to the girl on the floor. She was curled near the foot of a seat that looked like a dentists chair. She rolled the girl onto her back and gasped.

Crae, with Quinn shadowing him, went to Vex. He was manacled to the wall in the center of the right wall between the floor to ceiling bookshelves that lined left and right of his nook. Vex sat cross legged and eyes closed and did not move.

"Good of you to join us." Adam said.

"I am just here for Vex." Titian told him. Adam threw back his head and laughed. The tower echoed it back in dark voices. He looked back at Titian with one eyebrow cocked and the smile still floating on his lips.

"No, you're not." He petted his pointed lock of hair as he studied her. "You are here because you are tied to this moment. Chained to it, like Vex is chained to the wall." He tossed the lock of hair, " You puppet of prophecy, you."

Adam brought his feet down one at a time and the clump clump was loud echos in the silence. He stood and leaned on the desk, arms straight, as he looked Titian up and down, taking his time with each curve. Titian had never felt so naked.

"I have dreamed of you for centuries, but I never dreamed you would be so very *stunning*. Mmm. Mmm."

Titian suddenly flashed on one of Ella's memories, of Adam making that same sound in his throat after he had tied her to a barrel and cut her dress off with a knife. Titian ignored Adam mentally, but her eyes never left him. She focused her mind on Erin and Crae and she felt like a general getting field reports:

Vex was not damaged, but he was manacled. Crae could get the locks, but it

would take some time. Erin was in a silent panic. Her mind was whirling around and around and Titian could not make any sense out of it. Titian could not sense Quinn at all and didn't try. She was a little bit afraid that Adam could sense the tiniest leak in her armor against him.

Titian turned her attention back to Adam. He was still undressing her with his eyes.

"She saw me in Hell at the final battle." Titian said to him. Adam's expression did not change.

"Titian stands naked before you as her first howls into the night. When the needle lays over full moon bathing the first sun in her light." Adam replied. The eyebrow under his point of hair rose. "The thing about prophecy is that there is always more than one path into the future." He looked over at Erin and the girl lying on the carpet. "The little Irish one was right, by the way." Erin turned toward him and her look should have made him step back. She looked ready to hurl herself at him and rip his head off by sheer will. "Every powerful vampire in the city could feel you open like the red sea parting that first night."

Titian took the opportunity of Erin watching Adam to assess the area. There were three weapons on the wall to her left; a jousting lance, a scythe, and a cutlass, one on top of another. They were situated so that from his desk, Adam could grab the handle end of any one of them easily. The tower was a checkerboard of windows and walls rising up at least another story, Titian could not see the top. In the center of the tower, just inside her line of sight, she could see a spiky geometric object made of polished wood and sharp glass that was giving off a warm glow of light within the tower. Through the window, she noticed the waning moon soaring over the Space Needle near the edge of the sound.

"Titian." Erin's voice was hardly a whisper, but Titian turned to her and forgot the rest of the room.

"Allie." The name ripped from her lips and Titian flew to the side of the body on the floor, to her sister's side. Erin stood facing Adam without a word. Titian checked Allie for life signs, for breathing or a heartbeat, even though she

knew that her little sister was dead. The black area rug under her was squishy and crusty with her blood. She took her sister's head in her hands and kissed her forehead. Her eyes burned but no tears came as she sat with forehead to forehead with her sister, willing her to be alive. Willing her to be someone else. Willing the face to change into a strangers. She raised her head and looked, but the face had not changed and there was no doubt that it was Allie. She could not deny it. Having stepped past denial, Titian finally noticed the destruction that had been done to her sister. It was little wonder she hadn't recognized her immediately, she was bruised and pierced and bitten all over her body. There were huge twin gashes through the muscles on her arms and legs, but her torso and face were just bruised and scuffed.

Titian realized as she studied the body that not a single major artery or vein was pierced or ripped. He had been precise so that he could torture her for longer. For hours. Adam had tortured Titian's baby sister for hours.

The raging fire that had begun with the memories of Ella and from Ella were a campfire compared to the inferno that burned inside Titian now. She felt it fill her body like blood as she rose from her sister's side to face the evil that had wrought this. Adam stood perfectly polished and perfectly manicured.

“Why?” The question scraped out from Titian’s clenched jaws.

Adam didn’t laugh this time, he held her smoldering anger and pain in his eyes. He drank it into his soul. As she glared at him, the Thirst rose in Titian. Rage is the domain of the Thirst and the smell of Allie’s blood all around enticed it. The Thirst was suddenly a sickening thing to her, as it rose to circumstance without morality or decency. But still Titian let it fill her, she let it pump through her veins and meld with her, she forced it to her purpose.

Adam’s blue eyes were shadowed and dark as her watched her seduce the Thirst and he felt her pain grow with it, though all her defenses. He was ready when she released herself to it, hurling at him with an animal snarl. Adam bolted past her to the opposite wall with all the flair as a matador avoiding the horns. From a display nook in the shelves he grabbed a multi-rope bola by the center ball. Before Crae, who was only a few feet away kneeling by Vex, could react, Adam flung the bola at Titian’s legs. The five long ropes attached to the center were



pulled out taut by the centrifugal force of the spin. The ball at the end of each rope kept the lines whirling as the bola hit Titian in the back of her knee. The balls and ropes wrapped themselves in a tangle around her legs and around the foot of the desk.

Adam did not stop to watch and admire his handy throw, but chased the bola, grabbing Titian's red hair before the last ball stopped moving and used his momentum to slam her head into the desk. While she was stunned he grabbed each of her wrists in each of his hands. He brought them up between her shoulder blades, pushing her torso and face into the top of the desk, immobilized.

Titian was more stunned by the speed of his attack than having her head bashed into the desk. She had no time to react before she realized that Adam had her completely immobilized, at his mercy: a terrifying concept. If she could have ripped her own arm off to get out from under him, she would have done it without a second of hesitation. But she could not move.

Adam bent over her, pasting his body on top of hers and giving her no opportunity for leverage. He slowly sank his teeth into the muscle between her neck and her shoulder.

It hurt. It just fucking hurt. Titian struggled, but all she really managed was to squirm and flail her head against the desk. Adam did not stop when his fangs were in. he kept biting down, crushing the muscle in his jaw until she felt his fangs pierce through the other side of the pinched muscle. Titian willed herself not to scream, but in the silence of the room, her involuntary gasps of pain echoing through the tower were as loud as the loudest scream.

Crae and Erin were paralyzed to act. In spite of the fact that they were vampires, in spite of the fact that they drank blood, they did not live violent lives. They had held their own upstairs in the training room, true, but those soldiers had been children with wooden swords compared to Adam. Crae found that, against his will, he was terrified of Adam. Just as terrified as he had been for all those years he spent with the Society. No, more terrified. Adam had been a horrifying force, but back then he had still been a minion of the Society and of the Sun. Now he was the Sun and the whole of the Society was behind him and his destructive will.

Erin was waiting for the right moment, impatiently. From the angle she was at anything she could do would risk Titian. She twisted a spike of her hair with

her fingers as she bounced from foot to foot, wanting to help but not knowing what to do.

Titian clenched her jaw to muffle an unwilling scream as Adam started pulling his head back, his jaw still locked, tearing through the muscle. Adam released the pressure and twisted his head as he pulled the fangs out, leaving huge gaping, ripped holes. Titian's blood flowed out onto desk as she tried to hold in sobs of pain. Her own pain and also the pain of knowing now, just a little, what her sister had suffered here just a few hours ago. This was the pain that Ellie had suffered, and Crae, and who knew how many others.

Adam casually flicked his tongue into the bleeding holes he had made, tasting.

"You taste like fire." He whispered intimately into her ear, "And I must tell you, I am not sure whether to douse you or feed your flames." He laughed low and vicious in his ear and gave her shoulder a quick, rough bite before continuing, "Your friends don't seem to know what to do without you, Titian. Do you think they would have any hope against my Enforcers without you? No. I don't think so either. But I am not so horrid as rumor would have you believe. Submit to me and I will let them go."

Adam locked his mouth onto the first wound he had made and flicked his tongue into one of the gaping holes like he was trying to widen it. It felt to Titian like he had stuck a hot iron into her neck and she couldn't hold back a scream.

The scream was like a gong to Erin, calling her to a calm mind where she knew suddenly what to do.

*Crae!! Pick the locks and get Vex free as fast as you can. I know what to do!* She sent the thought out without limits, to the room at large as she started moving. Her timing was perfect: Adam raised himself from Titian slightly as Erin flew at him, head first and spiraling like a torpedo. She caught him, surprised, right in his stomach and drove him into the wall as hard as she could. They landed together in a heap on the floor.

Crae worked as fast as he could on the manacles around Vex's wrists. Each one had two sets of locks and he was only through the first lock on the first manacle so far. He wondered if he could just cut off Vex's hands, it would be faster and he would heal, even if he did heal slower than the rest of them. But Vex was completely unresponsive. Crae had never seen him like this, ever, and it

scared him. The last tumbler in the second lock clicked and the manacle fell off of his wrist. Crae moved to the other side and blotted out the distractions to work the problem.

Quinn used the confusion that Erin had wrought to move to Titian, who was still trapped to the desk by the bola. She had lifted the heavy wooden piece like it was styrofoam, but the rope was knotted around the foot of the desk and wouldn't be shaken off. Quinn only had time to bring out his knife to start cutting the lines before Adam could retaliate.

Erin was stunned by hitting the wall. She realized too late that she hadn't really come up with a plan behind getting Adam off of Titian. In their tumble, she had landed on top, so she jumped up to her feet and stomped her foot at his head, still on the ground. Adam caught her foot, just inches from his face, and held it there as he launched to his own feet. The unexpected move took Erin's other foot out from under her and she landed hard on her back, bouncing her head against the hardwood floor.

Titian grabbed Quinn by the shirt and pulled him to her.

"Help Erin! She can't fight him alone." She told him quietly, "I can get myself free." She pulled out her own knife as evidence. Quinn noticed that the damage Adam had done to her with his bite was not healing, but it didn't seem to be hindering Titian, so he didn't say anything.

Adam still held Erin's leg captive. She lay stunned on the floor again for an instant by the head blow. An instant was all that Adam needed. He took the moment to enjoy the sight of the youthful looking vampire sprawled on the floor below him, in his power by the grip of one hand. He drove his sharpened, pointy nails into the top of her foot and drove pointed teeth into the tendon near her ankle. Erin screamed a no-holds-barred scream and summoned her will to fly towards him, kicking her free foot up into his solar plexus. The impact lifted him up off the ground. He used the momentum, before he hit the wall, to rip his teeth through her tendon. It felt to Erin like he had razor blades coming out of the back of his fangs, running up and down to tear through the meat of her ankle. She channeled the pain, demanding that her other foot connect to Adam's face. Hard. Her whole body arched up into it, lifting her off the floor upside down. She didn't care if it took ripping her whole foot off and leaving it behind, she would fight to be free of him forever or die. As her kick landed below his ear, Erin opened her

eyes to the world upside down and scanned the room for options.

Crae was working on the second lock on the second manacle. Vex was still catatonic. There were weapons and mean-looking things freely interspersed with books on the wall of shelves: A flail with thorny looking balls ending each of the nine tails hanging further down the wall, past Allie's body, and the weapons at the end of the desk, but they were all so far away.

Erin's body straightened as her foot drove Adam's head back to hit the heavy frame of a huge mirror hung on the wall. She fell away from him, her tendon ripped out. She hit the ground rolling and saw Quinn step into the center of the room.

*The memory needs be in shadows foal .*

The words seemed to come from Erin and through her.

"No, Quinn. No!" She cried. Too late.

"William." Adam's voice was like dry ice on the skin. "The shadow."  
Distainful.

Erin looked back at Adam as she scrambled backwards away from him on the wooden floor. She noticed in the mirror that she could not see him, though he was standing right in front of it. Then she noticed the mirror itself. It was huge and intricately carved of a dark wood, sharp, thorny rose vines up each side to arch above the glass, supporting a small shelf. The shelf, like an alter, held a crown of woven thorns.

It was a moment that stood still, a breath that lasted a hundred heartbeats until the chime of a clock below brought Erin to that mental nexus again.

She knew what came next. In fact, she could see all the lines of the past converging on this moment and all the lines splitting off into the future.

This moment was hers and she was bound to it.

She leapt unexpectedly at Quinn. She braced herself like a gollum, her feet on his stomach and arms on his shoulders as she ripped a chunk of his neck, an animal tearing the flesh off. It was so incredibly unexpected that Quinn didn't even have time to fight before she released his shoulders and kicked off from him, pushing him backward toward Vex, while she propelled headfirst at Adam.

Erin wasn't aimed at Adam, but was soaring for the crown above him. She brought up her knee like Peter Pan, hoping to catch him under the chin, but Adam was ready for her. He caught the inside of her knee with one hand, digging iron

hard nails under her kneecap. He wrapped his other arm around her tiny torso, digging sharp into soft flesh.

She grabbed the sharp circlet heedlessly with both hands, before he could control her movement any more than he already did. The very next moment he was spinning her to expose her thigh to his teeth. The violent shift slammed her into the mirror, which shattered, raining shards of sharp around them both. She pulled her upper body up with her stomach muscles, supported by Adam's firm control of her lower body. He ripped fangs through her muscles, tearing it into a bleeding gaping hole and struck again, higher up on her leg.

Erin could not help but scream.

When she came back to herself out of the pain, Adam had his eyes locked on her face, feeding on her pain while her blood dripped down onto the polished dark wood.

"Lost ain't gone," Erin said, "til king has crown." Her voice echoed around the room like a siren song as she jammed the crown of wooden thorns down onto Adam's head with every bit of force she possessed. His smug look was replaced with shock, then pain as the wooden spikes started burning into his scalp and his skull.

He turned and threw her with every ounce of his preternatural power at the wooden and glass sun suspended in the center of the tower. Erin caught the sun spikes in the back. Glass and wood shattered through her body. Her mind was open wide to Titian as she saw the fulfillment of the lines of the future that she, Erin, had spawned by her actions, all happening in a millisecond.

Quinn quite literally fell into Vex's lap as Crae finally got the last lock free. The Shadow's blood from Erin's unexpected bite flowed onto Vex's hands. Vex opened his eyes and it wasn't the fierce demon of the Thirst that locked eyes with Quinn, but the rare gentle soul that had once sat human in a pub. Quinn did not hesitate, but reached his arm up to touch one of his beloved ones.

"Take back what is yours." He said, "Remember."

Vex brought his mouth gently to the wound that was made for him and drank the pain he had not caused and there was no suffering in it. Hollowed from the tortures of the night, in the peace he had found, Vex felt the memory of the night he had lost so long ago flow back into him. The Thirst was fed as a caged thing deep within him.

Titian felt all of this happening around her, within her, as she hurled herself up into the tower reaching for Erin. The little vampire flew away from Titian, towards the wall with the sun embedded in her back. Titian was nearly close enough to grab her foot, when she was jerked to a stop by a knot of cords still attaching her ankle to the damned desk. She pulled at the twisted twine, willing it to break, tethered like a hawk as Erin soared for the wall.

Adam didn't rip the thorns out of his head, but accepted his crown. The burning, flaming pain of it made him ball shaking fists by his head as blood tears ran down his face. He laughed maniacally with the sheer pain of it.

Titian's tether broke, finally, and she flew toward Erin.

Vex drew up from Quinn's fount with a deep first breath of life. Crae was standing in front of them, smiling down and offering a hand up, unaware in his focus on the task and the outcome of anything else happening in the room at his back, so he did not see Erin hit the wall. He heard her voice in her mind, and Vex did, and Titian looked into her eyes as Erin said "I love you" to her, and him, and him.

The sun burst into the wall and glass spiked shattered. Erin was driven into the suddenly stationary spikes, and they exploded out from her shoulder, her abdomen, and her chest. She burst into flames and sparks which burnt through the damaged wall and rained down through the tower onto Titian as she fell, uncontrolled on to the ground in despair with Adam's laughter around her.



Vex and Crae stood like statues, frozen in the shock of death within their minds, so sudden and unexpected. Quinn stood up in their silence and walked toward Adam, who was still laughing between gasping for breath. When he saw Quinn, he was instantly composed with a smile spreading on his blood rivuleted face.

Crae still had his hand outstretched and Vex took it to pull himself up. The action snapped Crae out of his stillness and he started to turn around, turn toward where Erin had made her last stand.

"No." Vex stopped him with a word and a hand gently on each shoulder. The quiet vampire caught Crae's eye and held it, demanding silently his full

attention. “She is not there now. But I am here and I need your help. I need you right now. “

Crae’s face went from being a shattered thing of grief to a stillness, a readiness as Vex held him in his glance.

“What do you need. Anything.”

“Drain me.” Vex ordered him, simply.

“What?”



“William.” Adam said, “I had nearly forgotten that you were lurking about.”

“You seem to have finally found your crown, Adam, just like you always wanted. Is it everything you dreamed it would be?”

“You have no idea what I dream, William. You have always been so simple minded. So narrowly focused. This crown is only the beginning, now that Titian is finally here.”

“Titian is finally here. She will be the end of you. Finally.” Quinn spat the words that he had been waiting to say for centuries. Adam laughed again.

“That is only one path, you narrow minded fool. She might be the beginning for me. “



Vex sighed and explained quickly, feeling the time grow short, “I have to get us out of here, like last time. But....” He looked away, ashamed, “I can’t. I just...can’t. Not by myself. I need the Thirst.”

Crae was shaking his head vehemently, “No, no. Vex, you don’t have to. We can fight him.”

Vex shook him, “Crae, listen to me! I have to do this. I want to do this. I need you to help me, right now! Now!” He drew his old friend into a strong embrace, tilting his head so that Crae had a clean shot at his neck.

Crae was stunned: This was a new Vex. Since Crae had met him, years and decades ago when they were both Adam’s lackeys, Vex had let himself be guided

or pushed by the forces around him without a fight. Whether it was the Thirst or Adam or, eventually, the beneficent prodding by himself and Erin, Vex had always gone with the flow like a leaf in the current. Secretly, Crae had been ashamed that he, too, had used the placid vampire on that night they had escaped. But now, there was a strength to Vex, a purpose, and Crae realized that he had to bend to Vex's will now. He had to trust him, do what he asked and drain him. He bit gently but deep.



“You have always been a naive dreamer, William.” Adam said, beginning to circle his old nemesis. “But without you there could not be Titian, so I have tolerated your existence.”

Quinn circled with Adam, his battle worn black silk shirt contrasting with Adam's bloody white suit.

“I don't have to tolerate you anymore.” Adam spat.



When Adam's laughter stopped, I snapped out of the trance that had embraced me. I was curled into a fetal ball in the center of the tower and ashes were still gently wafting down around me. Onto me. I could see the top edge of the moon through the hole blown in the tower.

*Erin's escape route.*

It was a rueful thought but hearing the words in my mind, I realized that was exactly what it was: Our escape route. I did not want to escape: I wanted to kill Adam. Every fiber of my being cried out for revenge, but tonight was not that night. I knew as fact that if we tried to end this tonight, we would all die. And Adam would remain.

*Unacceptable.*

I turned and saw Crae pulling back from feeding at



Vex's neck. He backed away from him, eyes wide, slowly and carefully. In the center of the room, Adam and Quinn were circling each other. As Adam circled closer to Vex, the placid vampire's entire demeanor changed. He shifted his feet and tensed his arms, positioning himself like a cat ready to pounce.

Quinn's eyes flicked to his progeny for only a moment, but it was enough to tip Adam off. He started to turn. Vex, in his Thirst frenzy was hyper-aware and ready. Before the blond vampire could face him, he ran at Adam, jumped. His feet hit Adam in the small of the back, his hands latched into Adam's hair, heedless of the thorns biting his own hands. He pulled Adam's neck to bite out a chunk of flesh and latched on to drink before they hit the floor.

Nearby, church bells played a chimed melody. The sound broke my fascination with the sudden, uninhibited violence of the attack.

"Tower bells sing, your path determined before the last ring." Quinn quoted. He looked around at me and Crae. "We have to get out. Now!"

"There will be guards right outside the door!" Crae said, panicked.

*DONG.*

"This is our way out!" I yelled to them, pointing at the hole in the tower. "Get Vex!"

Crae looked from me to Vex, to Quinn, and back to me completely unsure how to do that. Vex was going at Adam like an animal. He bashed his head against the floor over and over to stun him, so he could go for the limbs. He was tearing off Adam's left hand with braced feet to hold, ripping through the meat with teeth and sheer strength.

Quinn walked purposefully to Vex, with a resigned look on his face. He bit his own wrist as he walked behind the frenzied vampire, grabbed him by the hair, and pulled him away from Adam. Vex fought him until

Quinn put his own bleeding wrist in front of Vex's face. Vex latched onto it and Quinn released his hair to grab him around the waist. They flew past me.

*DONG.*

The opening that Erin had made was technically too small for Quinn and Vex together. Quinn barreled through anyway, getting scratched and seared by the wooden lathes as they doubled the size of the hole.

While they made their escape, Crae ran over and grabbed the still stunned Adam by the ankle. I ran to collect the husk of what had been my sister.

*DONG.*

"What time is it?" Crae asked as he dragged Adam to the manacles that had recently held Vex captive.

"No idea." I responded as I scooped up the corpse. "If it is 3am, we are already fucked."

"I want to kill him." He snapped a manacle around each of the maniac's legs. "It would only take a minute."

"I know. But go." I screamed at him with my voice and with my mind, "Go. Now!"

I stayed a moment, debating with my own desire to be done with this. Maybe if just I stayed and killed him, only I would be sacrificed.

*Titian!* I heard Quinn's voice calling through the dark thoughts of my mind and with sudden, terrible decision, I flew with all my speed toward the hole, holding Ally close into me so she wouldn't be shredded by the splinters.

*DONG.*

The last bell chime was clear and sweet and hung in the still air of Queen Anne until the world was silent.

## Chapter 10



### The Fallen

I took my sister south, past the lights of Seattle, over the towns and evergreens and big patches of blackberry bushes to the Mount Olivet cemetery in Renton. It is the resting place of Jimi Hendrix among others, including our family.

I had thought to heal her wounds with my blood and leave her on our grandparent's grave to be found, but there was too much damage for me to fix. If I left her here, beaten and brutalized to death, there would be a police investigation that would never be solved. That was just unacceptable. I could not put my mom and dad through that kind of agony. I would not let Adam's crime shape my little brother's life like that.

I found the maintenance shed and got a shovel. I laid Allie to rest between our grandma and grandpa. I laid the sod back in carefully so no one would notice. Then I stood there.

I knew I should say something, but there was too much to be said and there was nothing to be said.

I found a grave with an overabundance of flowers and took a potted plant back to the new, hidden grave. In the silence of the night and the silence of grief I dug out a hole and put the white flowers in the earth. I sliced my wrist and let my blood drip down onto the roots before filling the dirt back in. My offering to the dead.

"I am so sorry, Allie." I whispered. "This is my fault and I'm sorry." The words sounded hollow. I felt hollow.

I walked through the monuments and stones and tombs for hours before I wandered up toward the Jimi Hendrix grave. It is a large open pavilion with an acoustic

dome overhead. Around it and inside between the benches lining the circumference are pages from Jimi's journals, etched in marble for perpetuity. I had come here for hours when I was in high school to listen to taped live-shows and smoke pot with my friends. I had spent my rebellion here. Now I wanted to find solitude and answers, but instead I found Quinn.

"How did you know I would be here?" I asked him, emotionless.

"Old indian trick." He responded. His openness reached out to me, but I was locked deep within myself and I wasn't coming out.

"Titian," He said finally, "I am so sorry. I didn't know -"

"What didn't you know?" I cut him off. His words were a match lighting dry rage and pain that was bottled with gasoline in my heart. "What exactly didn't you know? Seems like you knew everything right from the beginning, while you left me to stumble around and figure it all out myself. Did you know that I was Titian when you saw me in that bar? Did you know that Adam was here, in Seattle? Did you know that he is a twisted fucking sadist? Did you know that he would try to hurt me in any way he could? Huh? What exactly did you not know, Quinn, because from where I stand it seems like you knew a whole hell of a lot."

I screamed the words into his face and he stood there in complete neutral stillness. Without reaction and without flinching in the face of my anger. My fists were balls at my side and I wanted to hit him, punch him, slap him until he hurt as much as I was hurting.

Instead I turned away from him and screamed into the night without words until I had no breath left and I sank to the cold floor of the monument. Quinn walked around, deliberate and slow, to crouch down in front of me. He waited until I looked up into his face.

"I did not know he would go after your family. Truly."

"If you had known, would you have told me?" I asked. He nodded. "Then, why not the rest? Why didn't you tell me what you knew?"

He sighed and sat cross-legged in front of me. "There is a lot more to the story than I can tell you tonight. But, I suppose the only thing that really matters is my own epiphany. When I Awoke, I was in a hole I had dug in the ground in the middle of nowhere in Pennsylvania. All I had were the journal and Ella's locket." He pulled the locket out of his shirt. It was a beautiful thing of silver and swirls. "The journal told me that Ella was dead and Adam killed her. It made me remember. Not everything, but I remembered enough. The only other thing I recalled was Ella's voice: 'Titian will come with discarded words and she will avenge and restore. Her words are your law and if you break them, you hand the devil the keys to the world.'"

He let the words sink in for a minute.

"I didn't know that the prophecy was my own and that Ella had repeated the the words back to me."

He watched me as my anger began to ebb away.

"I just wanted to be free." I told him, "but I feel like I am more trapped by this web of prophecy than I was by my life before."

"The whole world isn't about this war, Titian, I promise. The world is so beautiful and strange. So much more beautiful and strange than you could possibly know right now. I want to show you New York in the autumn and New Orleans in the winter. I want you to see the House on the Rock and the lakes of the Ozark mountains before the battle draws us in again. Please, please, come with me."

"Not yet." I told him, even as I nodded, "I need...I need to be alone first."

He stood without a word and kissed me gently on the

forehead before he walked away, human slow, into the night. Where he had sat, there was a key on a string. The post was studded with stylized thorns and instead of a key ring loop, there was a rose.

I held the key for a moment before flying north in the pre-dawn light.



I only had about half an hour before dawn when I got to Erin's Rose Family crypt. The key fit and the candles, left lit, were still burning on the tomb inside. Everything looked disheveled as it had just a few days ago when Erin had brought me here. It seemed like she would pop up from behind something any minute, but I knew she wouldn't.

I took a candle and went over to where the stone was moved from the floor in the corner and, sure enough, it led to an underground chamber. This one was much, much smaller and more shallow than the one in the pyramid, but it had a sleeping bag and a pillow with a letter on it addressed: Titian.

I slipped down and moved the stone back over the opening. The sleeping bag was warm and plush. The pillows smelled like Erin. I settled in and opened the letter.

*Titian,*

*It is not your fault that I am dead.*

*Look, I am writing it again so that you will believe:*

*It is NOT your fault that I am dead.*

*When I went delving in your mind just now, I found the nexus of knowledge again and I am swimming in it even as I write this. I think you spoke truth for me when you spoke for yourself: This is what I have really been searching for all this time. All the paths and choices of this night are laid out before me clear and I know what I need to do to send you and Vex and Crae*

*down the right path. Down the best path. The other paths lead to a darkness so horrid I will not even write of it.*

*Not that I have time to wax on. But you need to know this, my beautiful Titian, my beloved Titian:*

*Fire destroys and Fire creates. It is life and light and warmth. Even my death will not stop there from being some dark times ahead for you and the boys, but you are the candle in the darkness. You are the creator and you are the destroyer.*

*Erin*

I read the letter through twice before the sun destroyed me for the day.

# After



“You would know the secret of death.

But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?  
The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day cannot unveil the  
mystery of light.

If you would indeed behold the spirit of death, open your heart wide  
unto the body of life.

For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.”

*—Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet*

—

## Chapter 1



### Awake

Awake.

Allie is dead.

Erin is dead.

Thirsty.

*Fuck.*

I could hear someone shuffling around above me. I sat up in the complete darkness and slowly, quietly lifted the stone to peek, wondering if Adam had found me somehow.

*But the sun just set.*

The candles were lit and Wrath was sitting on the floor in the center of the room, looking through a package of photos. In his assumed solitude he laughed at some of the pictures, smiled, and occasionally looked very sad. He had picked a few and pulled them aside. I let the stone back down, carefully and sat in



the dark.

*To wait or not to wait?*

That was the question. I was surely relieved that it wasn't an enemy, but I just didn't want to see anybody. I felt like my chest was a gaping open wound. Kind words and platitudes would be salt. But, he had my bag and I wanted the solace and wisdom of Kahlil Gibran, I wanted the picture of my family, and I wanted my journal.

*Decision made.*

Wrath heard the stone scrape and jumped up and around, ready to fight whatever was behind him. When he saw me he grabbed his chest in relief, walked right over and hugged me, holding me tight and long. It was completely unexpected and unexpectedly comforting to let out a long sigh and melt into his undemanding embrace.

With sudden realization I pushed him to arms length, "What are you doing up? You...I mean...We took a lot of blood." He didn't look pale or sickly in the least.

"Honestly, I have no idea." He grinned, looking pleased, "I slept all night and most of the day and when I woke up, I felt just fine."

"Did Vex and Crae...?"

"They made it back just fine. They told me about Erin and your sister." He didn't say that he was sorry or try to find comforting words, he just gave me a look of shared loss. A moment of silence.

"I stopped by to sit on the stoop and have some time with my memories. The door was swinging open." He shrugged: Here endeth the tale.

"Erin was dear to you."

"I think Erin was dear to everyone who met her." He replied. He walked to the entrance and came back with my bag, handing it to me silently.

"Wrath?" I stopped him, "Erin left me this place,

but I have another...lair" even in my state, I couldn't believe I had just actually used that word, "and I don't really need this place. Would you like to have it, someplace to crash and get away from everything?" I held the key out and he took it.

"Thank you, Titian. I really appreciate it. I travel around a lot and having someplace to call home here in Seattle would be...wonderful." His smile was genuine and full of camaraderie. It reminded me of the musing I had entertained last night, before any of the craziness, of meeting him in the bar and taking him down to the boudoir. That fantasy transformed and I thought how nice it would be to sit and talk with someone who was so undemanding and without any grand plan.

"Are you going to be in town for a few days?" I asked. I told him where the bar was.

"Absolutely. I will meet you there tomorrow night. But, look, is it cool if I tell Crae and Vex where to find you? They were really worried last night when you didn't rendezvous at the pyramid."

"Oh, shit." I hadn't given a thought to it when I took my sister south. I considered walking over to tell them myself, but I just wanted to be alone. "Yeah. I would appreciate it." I told him. Then, I ran out the door with all my speed, ending the conversation and heading to my solitude.

## Chapter 2



### Depths

I stopped at a grocery store on my way to Pioneer Square and bought two gallons of pig blood. I knew it wasn't going to feed the Thirst for long, but it was better than the alternatives. I was emotionally drained for sure, though I did find amusement in telling the meat counter clerk that the blood was for a horror film. Amusement aside, I just couldn't face the intensity of feeding from someone.

The bar above the boudoir was hopping, but not packed. No one noticed me going down to the storage cellar and the boudoir was just as I had left it. It felt like coming home after a long day. I filled a wine glass with some of the vital fluid and dumped my bag unceremoniously on the floor. I unhooked the corset until it came off. I unlaced the boots and pulled them off one at a time, while I contemplated the pile that spilled out from my backpack.

The t-shirts, jeans, and sweats seemed like an alien uniform to me, now. Strangely, I had come to like the visual drama and finery in my new world. I folded them up and stuffed them on a back shelf in the storage room. It just seemed wrong to put them in with the glorious garments in the closet of the boudoir. I put the underwear and socks back in the bag. Without the clothes, it seemed like a mighty small pile to be all my belongings. I opened the box that held the prophetic napkins and put the "open when you remember" envelope inside. I found the twine, tied it closed and stuck it back in the bag. The money went in the bag too.

Sitting side by side, my journal and Quinn's looked

like second cousins. His was more detailed, more ornate. Funny, that in a modern world of industrial wonders where we can make hundreds in the time it took to make one a few centuries ago, that what we have is so inferior. I picked up Quinn's journal and ran my fingers over the designs pressed in the leather while I thought about Ella.

It is a wonder how such a short, normal life could end in such abnormality and horror. It is a wonder how such a short, normal life could reverberate down through centuries, to me. Ella had been younger than me when Adam killed her. She had been just a little older than Allie.

Allie.

The pain of that was sharp and immediate. I felt like I had failed her. I wondered, if I had left earlier, if I had said something more to Adam outside the bar when I didn't know who he was, if, if, if...would she have been safe? Would she have lived?

With a sigh, I put Quinn's journal in the bag and picked up my own. I realized then that the picture of me and my family was absent. I turned the journal upside down and shook it, thinking it may have jammed between the pages. Nothing. I pulled Quinn's journal back out and shook it. Nothing. I emptied the bag again, flipping through the money and delving through the napkins, searching the pockets of the bag.

Nothing.

It was gone.

It was the last straw. I sank to the floor and let it all out. I cried and howled and sobbed for what seemed like days until I was exhausted, lying on the carpeted floor. The tears stopped and my breath stopped hitching. The crying was done, but the despair remained.

My eyes were closed and I felt like I was outside time and space, in this strange alien body. It was

Thirsty. It was always Thirsty. I had the blood just ten feet away, but it was too far. Far too far and too much trouble to get. Fuck it. I'll starve. The Thirst wasn't the demanding, insistent thing I was used to tonight, but a gentle, cajoling thing within me. Blood would make it all better, it seemed to say, the blood would help.

Inside my head, I was a petulant child. I had been graceful. I had been gracious. I had assimilated to my new state of being, I had learned and adapted. I had gone and saved the fucking day. Now I was done and the Thirst could just take a hike. I was done.

*Maybe I should be done. Maybe I should go stand outside on Pioneer Square and greet the morning.*

The thought held both fear and comfort. I could just be done, it was within my power and would take no more effort than sitting outside. But, I realized, I didn't want to be done for forever. I didn't want death. I wanted to live. The world had just opened to me and I wanted to explore it.

It was like a candle in the absolute darkness, the realization that in spite of everything, I wanted to live.

I crawled, inching my way to the glass on the table. I felt weak with the depression still weighing on me. I kept my mind on that little flicker of light as I pulled myself up and poured the viscous liquid into my mouth. As I drank, the flame seemed to grow bigger, brighter. The problems weren't gone. Allie and Ella were still dead, the picture I so wanted was still missing, Adam was still out there. But I started looking at solutions instead of the problems.

I sat myself up leaning against the chaise lounge and realized that Quinn was sitting in one of the chairs watching me. His expressionless face held no judgment or emotion. Just his eyes sparkled with curiosity.

I stared back at him. Watching him watch me as the minutes ticked by for days without any clock to mark it. After years of being statues, he moved concisely and without hurry. Standing, he walked over and pulling something out from inside of his jacket, over his heart. He dropped it above me and it wafted down to land balanced on my knees. It was the picture.

I looked at it for a long time. It seemed like lifetimes ago that mom had gotten those ridiculous sweaters and wrapped them all for us to open on Christmas Eve. Allie had given me the journal. She was so young in the picture that was taken only two years ago and she always would be young. I felt ancient and I would always be young, too, and I would never be young again.

I looked back up at Quinn. I had no idea why he had the photo or how he had come here or when, but I appreciated it. Words were imprecise, imperfect. Our understanding was beyond words. I felt a sad smile on my lips, and it was new and unfamiliar, but was me. Quinn smiled back and it was a sad and knowing smile that had replaced the innocent grin of William.

I looked back down at the picture. I looked at it for only a heartbeat, for an eternity. When I looked back up, my journal and a cherished looking antique fountain pen were sitting on the chaise. Quinn's journal was sitting on the bed. Quinn was gone.

My journal felt like a relic. I flipped through the inscribed pages without seeing them, without looking and without caring until my thumb flashed by blank pages. I stopped randomly. Twisting the cap off the pen was so much more deliberate than uncapping a ballpoint ever had been. It was heavy in my hand and the flat nub made my ugly words beautiful.

*Allie is dead.*

*I thought I was a monster when I Awoke four days ago.  
I did not know what "monster" meant.  
Adam is the monster and Allie is dead because of him.  
If I must wake a million nights and walk to the sun and  
back,  
I will see him dead.  
Not because of any words that have been spoken or any  
vision seen.  
I will see him dead because I will it so, for all those he has  
destroyed.*



I buried myself in the tale and the writing of it for the next few days. I drank when I was Thirsty. I looked at the picture and I mourned for the life that was gone forever. I mourned for my parents and the life they had built for themselves and for us children that was gone. I realized there was no guilt in my heart for that. I missed them and came to know that missing them would probably never leave me completely. I called my father's work deep in the night when it was sure to go to voice mail and left him a message.

"Hi, dad. I want you to know that I am okay. Everything worked out and I am off to travel and take some opportunities that have come up. Don't worry about me. I heard about Allie having disappeared, dad. If my coming home would help find her, I would, but it wouldn't help. Try to keep mom from smothering Max too much. Take her out to dinner. Tell her I'm safe and grown up. I love you, dad. I love you all and I miss

you."

After I hung up, I pasted the photo into the journal so I wouldn't lose it again.

Vex showed up one night, knocking at the Seattle Underground door and startling me onto the ceiling. Literally.

"Wrath came to the bar like you arranged, but you never showed." He shrugged, "I was worried."

Shit. I had totally forgotten, down here in my padded cell.

"How are you?" I asked him probing. He seemed different, there was a confidence in him and a little more of the beast lurking on the surface, where before it had been submerged. He smiled, unrestrained.

"Altered." He answered, "I am altered. Quinn, he gave me the Lost Night back and...I am a different person than I thought I was. I had this big blank for so long. I was me and in my life and the next thing I knew, I was on this battlefield with blood in my mouth and my brother in my lap. Quinn said that I would remember, but the days and weeks and months and it never did. There was this gap, you see, and I told myself stories to fill it. Sometimes I was a hero and sometimes I was the villain, but I never *knew*."

He laughed, as though at a folly.

"Now I know."

"Are you the hero or the villain?" I asked

"A little of both. Would you like to know? Would you like to see?" He became shy again, before meeting my eyes with a hypnotizing directness, "You are part of even my little tale."

I was shaking my head before he had finished talking, "No. Maybe...maybe another night, but not now. I have enough ghosts in my head for now."

"Crae left." He changed the subject, relishing the shock on my face. "With the girl. I think they are having a honeymoon of sorts." He paused a long



moment. "I think I remind him too much of Erin."

"We all carry ghosts." I said, "But it is more than that, Vex. He left because you don't need him anymore. Time for you to try out your wings."

Vex stood, and turned to speak from the door, "'Your soul is oftentimes a battlefield, upon which your reason and your judgment wage war against your passion and your appetite.' Gibran."

He left, leaving the quote hanging in the air around me, tangible. I dug the little Khalil Gibran book out of the bag. I call it a book, but it is more than that to me. The spine wore out on the tiny thing long ago, so I saved the covers and made a spine out of duct tape. But it felt wrong in my hand, when I picked it up looking for words to make sense of the clutter in my head. So I covered the duct tape and cover with leather, leaving a circle to show the face embossed.

I let it fall open in my hand:

I read quietly, to myself, "For without words, in friendship, all thoughts, all desires, all expectations are born and shared, with joy that is unacclaimed."

And the words that I have read so many times suddenly click into meaning. I continue reading silently, the voice in my head unbarricaded, reading to all the world that could hear the words.

I felt Quinn long before he came in, on the street, in the bar, coming silently in the door behind me. In perfect syncopation with the voice within me.

"Seek him always with hours to live." I heard Quinn's voice speaking the last line in my ears and my head and my heart. He stood in the door, my shadow, and I could hear his heart beating and his dreams and his desires, finally unguarded.



The End



## Acknowledgments



My creative process does not happen in a vacuum. I believe in fiction crediting known inspirations as a non-fiction cites references. I wish I could list every artist that has ever inspired me, but I limited myself to what I was directly influenced by while writing.

Music: A Perfect Circle, NIN, Dresden Dolls, Rammstein, Tori Amos, David Bowie, Peter and the Wolf by Tchaikovsky

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I wish, also, to acknowledge my patrons: Thanks to their sponsorship, I am able to think beyond the money model of the world I live in and release this book in the way I would like to world to be, with art and culture available to all and trusting that I will be provided with what I need.

Alix Spinks  
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Edward Stanton  
Theresa Kolpakas



Thanks to google for making research so fascinating and easy.



## **A special note from AmarA for this 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Authors Preferred Format**

*Dear reader,*

*There is a sort of sadness that comes from coming to the end of a book. Especially one like this one which, while being a complete tale in and of itself, is clearly part of a larger story. Extra especially when you can't just run out and get the next book because it isn't written yet.*

*At the end of the Incarnations of Immortality series books by Piers Anthony, he added these strange tales about his own real life and how the specific incarnations - Death, Nature, Fate, Good, Evil, etc – affected his world while he was writing about each one. I loved those notes, perhaps as much as I loved the actual story of the book.*

*When I set to release AWAKE, I found an excellent distributor (Draft2Digital) that reformatted my story for ebook without a hassle or a huge fee. I was thrilled that my vampire tale would be available on Kindle and Nook and Ibooks and other things I had not even heard of, but when I downloaded the file, I found that the character of the book as told through the visual fonts was gone. It was still my story and still good and readable, but it was not my book. My book has suns and moons as spacers and different fonts for Titian and for the omniscient narrator and for each hand-written voice. As a painter and designer, the visual aspect of a thing is as important as the words. So, I looked around and found a site that I liked, that was reputable and safe, on which I could publish and distribute this, the Authors Preferred Format.*

*Here I sit, having skimmed through the whole of 270 pages again, making slight adjustments and little changes. I reread the AFTER section entirely and made some alterations and, like you, reached “the end” and the acknowledgments and felt, well, a little let down. Not because the ending was terrible, but because it was the end.*

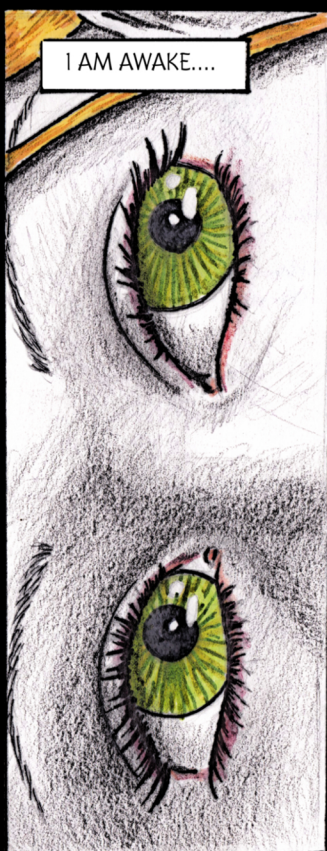
*During the course of writing the book, when I reached a point when I did not know what happened next in spite of bludgeoning my brain for the rest of the story, I would start to draw. When I am drawing, I don't really think about the skill too much. Better to just let my hand and brain communicate without my ego and consciousness getting in the way. So while my hand revealed each character to me, I would relax and suddenly find that the story was there, waiting for me. Like a friend or a lover at the end of a long day.*

*Sometimes, while I wrote, another story from the same world would come knocking at my door. Tales that did not belong to this book. Some that did not even belong in the trilogy in envision this story becoming. I would take up my journal and jot it down.*

*Those stories and those drawings are my gift to you, dear reader, to make the end of the tale the beginning of something else.*

AmarA

1 October 2015

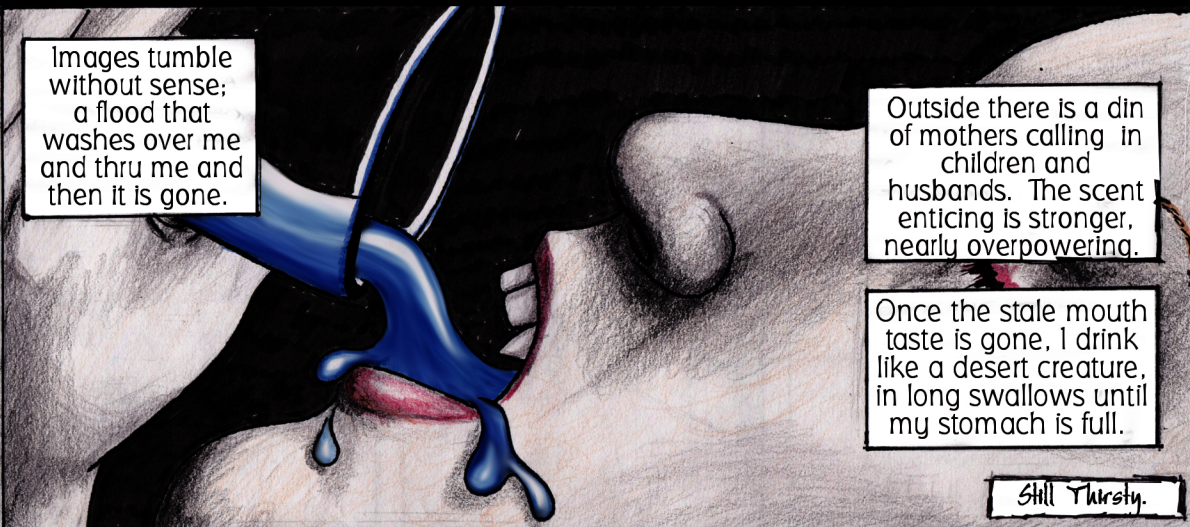






I am no stranger  
to drinking - I am  
in college - but  
I've never  
blacked-out  
before. It is  
damned  
disconcerting,  
that Blank Space.

I can recall  
yesterday morning,  
remember going to  
class, eating, riding  
the bus home, then  
the phone rang...



Images tumble  
without sense;  
a flood that  
washes over me  
and thru me and  
then it is gone.

Outside there is a din  
of mothers calling in  
children and  
husbands. The scent  
enticing is stronger,  
nearly overpowering.

Once the stale mouth  
taste is gone, I drink  
like a desert creature,  
in long swallows until  
my stomach is full.

Still Thirsty.